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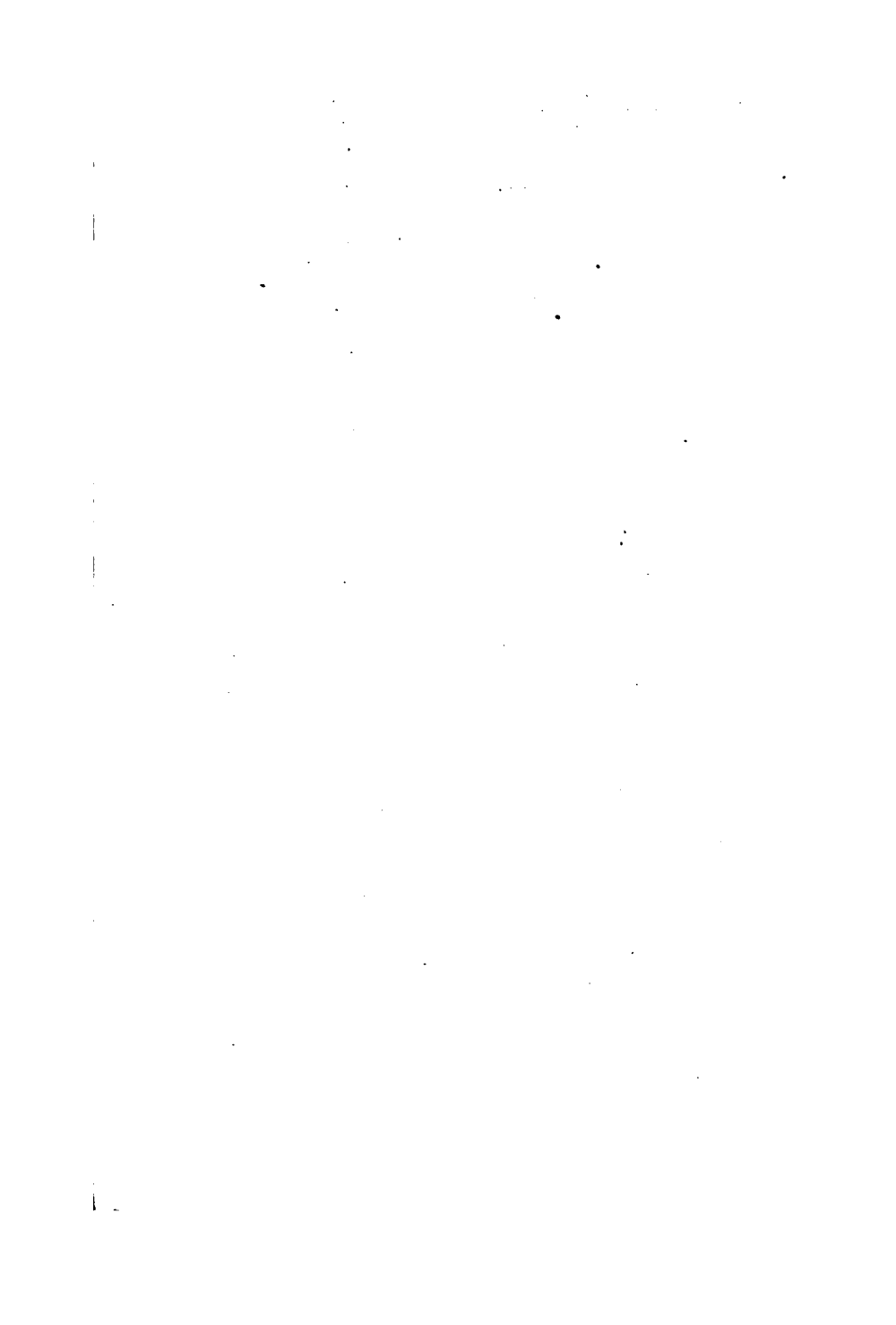
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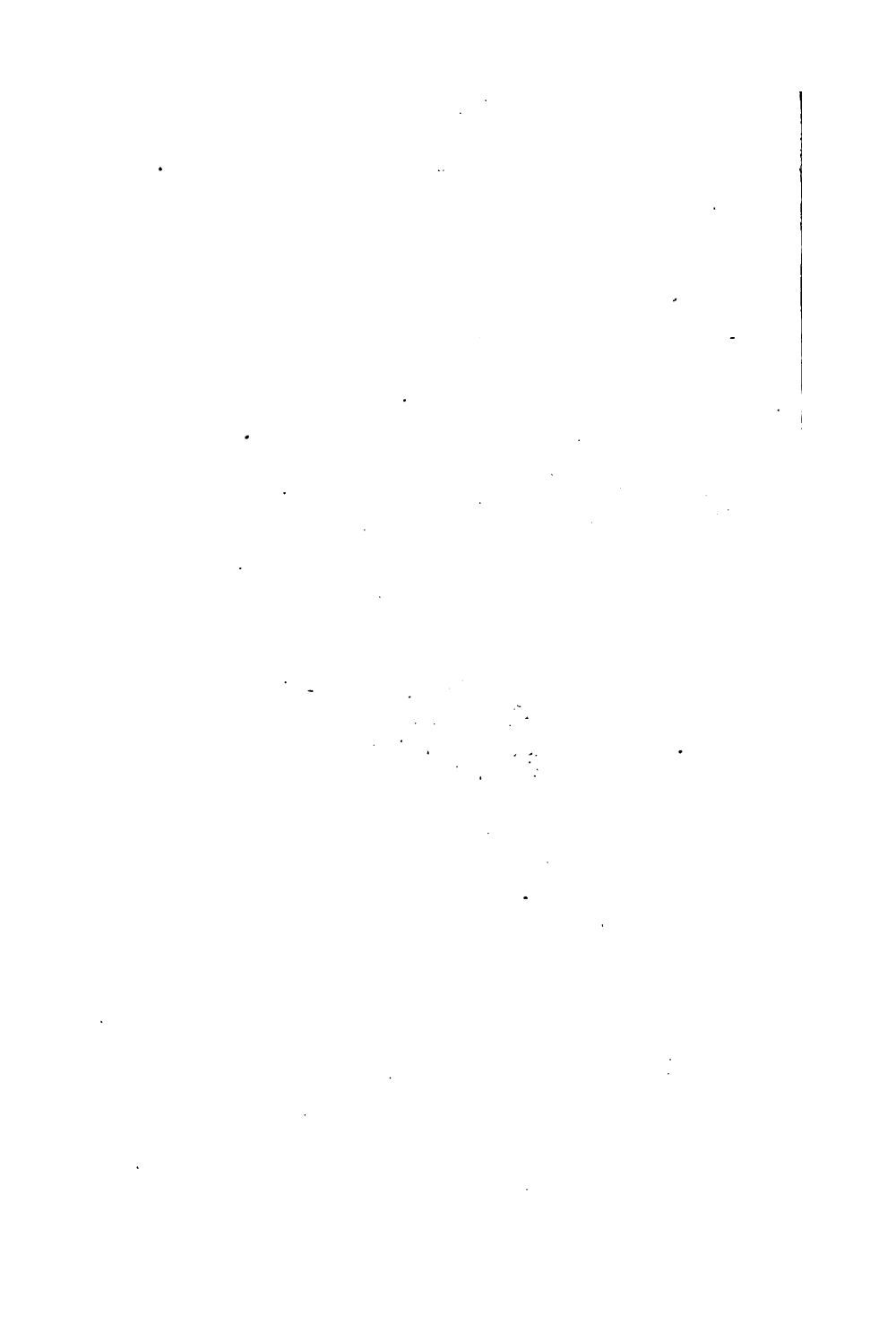
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THE
JUBILEE MEMORIAL
OF THE
SCOTTISH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES.



A. FULLARTON & CO.,
EDINBURGH, LONDON, AND DUBLIN.

1849.



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PREFATORY NOTICE.

Extract from Minutes of the Thirty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the Congregational Union of Scotland:—"MR. CAMPBELL of Edinburgh, after making a statement respecting the commencement of the religious movement in Scotland in 1798, to which the rise of the Congregational body in this country may be traced, moved, That during the present year, arrangements be made for Jubilee Services, to be held in the principal towns of Scotland, in commemoration of that event, and that a Committee be appointed for this purpose. MR. ARTHUR of Aberdeen seconded the motion, which was unanimously agreed to. The following are the names of this committee—MESSRS. KINNIBURGH, SWAN, CULLEN, KNOWLES, CAMPBELL, and DR. ALEXANDER."—In fulfilment of this resolution, a circular was addressed to each of the Congregational Churches in Scotland, recommending appropriate services during the month of October 1848, in celebration of the rise of the Congregational body in this country. Besides the services proposed to be observed by each church, which, there is reason to believe, were almost universally attended to, and in some cases with the most beneficial effects, aggregate meetings were arranged to be held successively in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. All these series of meetings took place, with the exception of those in

Dundee, which were prevented by the sudden and lamented death of the Rev. Dr. Russell. On all these occasions a strong desire was expressed that some Memorial of the services should be preserved, especially by the publication of such a selection of the Addresses delivered at the time as could be formed into a connected series. This volume has been prepared to meet that desire. In addition to the papers contained in this volume, the Committee have, at the urgent desire of those who heard it, published and widely circulated as a tract an "Address on Attendance at Church Meetings," delivered in Albany Street Chapel, Edinburgh, on the evening of Tuesday, the 24th October, by the Rev. ROBERT LANG, M.A., who has been appointed successor to the late Dr. Russell, as pastor of the church assembling in Ward Chapel, Dundee. This tract they would earnestly recommend to general perusal.

EDINBURGH, *March*, 1849.

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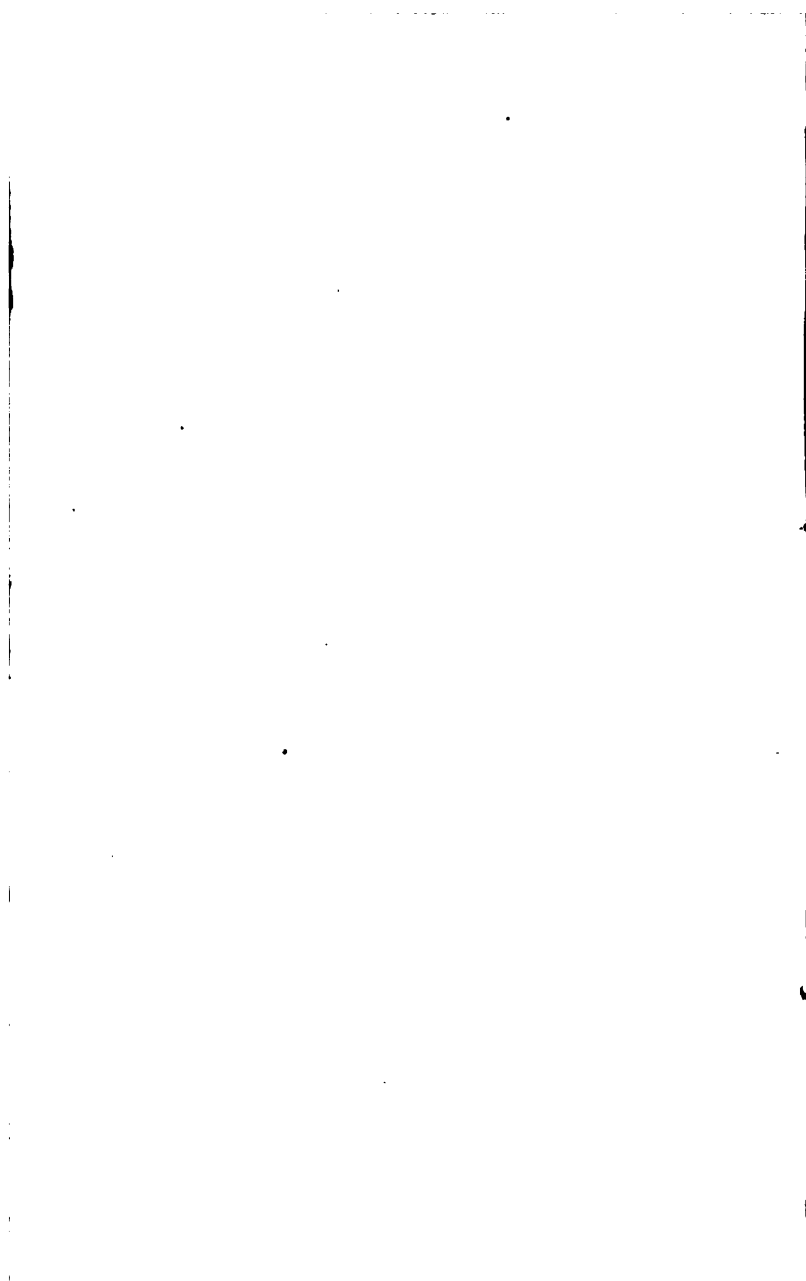
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INTRODUCTION,

BY THE

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INTRODUCTION.

I.

The Design of the Jubilee Services.

THE Scottish Congregational churches profess that their distinctive polity embodies certain Scriptural truths not admitted, or not adequately honoured by the other religious sects.

On this ground alone do they vindicate their denominational existence, and celebrate the fiftieth year of their history, as a Jubilee.

They have a hereditary persuasion, that an honest sectarianism is the best contribution to Christian unity; that the error which does not conceal itself will more speedily undergo needful refutation; and that truth spoken in the spirit of meekness ought not to despair of ultimate homage from all who are "of the truth," and hear Christ's voice.

But to vindicate Scottish Congregationalism is scarcely, if at all, the design of this volume. It deeply concerns these churches themselves to know the history of their formation; because, by a just estimate of the circumstances leading to that event, they may be assured that so wide a dissent from prevailing opinion and practice was not presumptu-

ous and schismatic; that the fervour of their zeal was not extravagant; that their errors and defects were the mere accidents of their position; and that it belongs to them to render a service, to which no other religious community is competent, to the cause of spiritual truth.

After the lapse of half a century, such a review can be taken with more of the calmness and candour requisite to a right judgment than can be probably expected when the memory of painful struggles, wounding calumnies, and intolerant persecution is recent. Even such an interval may not secure the impartiality of the historian from all disturbing influences; but the materials of the annalist at least are as copious as they can ever become. Some facts are extant now which, if not speedily collected, may evade all future search; and whilst the generation, into whose doings and sufferings inquisition is made, has passed away, some of its members survive, whose recollection can supply interstitial facts, and whose personal narrative must illustrate the spirit of the time.

The grateful satisfaction with which the recent progress of Congregationalism in Scotland is regarded, arises from the conviction that that polity is of apostolic institution, and has been consecrated by a great "cloud of witnesses," who, from the beginning, have been martyrs to its truth. Like the gospel of which it is a part, its progress has been slow, and its reverses discouraging. But being truth, it has not perished. Here and there, after a long interval of apparent death, it is resuscitated; like the seeds recently ex-

humed after the sleep of centuries, which are no sooner exposed to air and genial heat, than they germinate as in their natural spring-time, and flourish as the representatives of species long reckoned extinct or exiled from their native home. Scotland has not borne so obscure a part in the history of the Reformation, that the adoption, even by a small portion of her intelligent and high-principled sons, of this primitive constitution of the Church of Christ should be counted an event either unimportant or unhopeful.

Should any charge us with an inordinate ambition to possess a *history*, the reproach, to say the least, is new. It is proverbially true, that while other Protestant sects would zealously monopolize certain venerable names as their peculiar ancestry, and boast themselves of time-honoured standards which have fixed with a species of authority the meaning of the divine rule of faith and order, Congregationalists have not zealously competed for this species of honour. No doubt they knew that their simple polity, having little to recommend it to the patronage of worldly powers, had been less allied than other forms of Protestantism with the high estates of this world, and had not given mould to national constitutions. No council has assembled, under royal sanction or invested with the venerableness of a dignified hierarchy, to proclaim and vindicate its dogmas. Its acts and sufferings have not occupied so elevated and conspicuous a stage as those of other systems. With a brief but notable exception, its career has been one of obscure struggle. Its declarations of

faith and order have not been laws for the church, but pleadings that the names of its adherents might be exempted from reproach, and their persons from persecution. It has been the happiness of the Congregational churches to be led back for their names of honour to Christ and his Apostles, and to derive their *prestige* of authority directly from "the churches of God which in Judea were in Christ Jesus,"—careful that no human ancestry should be suffered to intercept the light which comes from a higher source,—satisfied, if in their doctrine and discipline, their character and practice, they could discover the image of the primitive church,—glorying in this seal of the Holy Spirit, even if it should not be accompanied with the *imprimatur* of human authority and wisdom,—and little discouraged, if they could discern their birth-place amid the streaming glories of Pentecost, though their intervening history were hid in obscurity and oblivion.

"The object proposed," says the official Circular, "is not display—not to eulogise our system, or commend ourselves,—but by 'remembering the years of the right hand of the Most High,' to seek the establishment and revival of our churches, and give effective utterance to the prayer, 'Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.'

"The retrospect of the early history of the churches will supply grounds of—

Grateful Rejoicing, for the manifold blessings graciously vouchsafed to our churches during this period ;—

Deep Humiliation, for our unfaithfulness in our high vocation ; and for the many hindrances which we have offered to the progress of the Lord's work ;—

Hope, that the grace and faithfulness of God, so abundantly displayed *then*, in answer to believing prayer, will not be withheld if we, in like manner, wait for God ;—

Fear, that, should vital godliness in our churches decline, the Gospel be less simply and faithfully preached, spiritual discipline be relaxed, the Divine ordinances be maintained with less of Scriptural simplicity, the spirit of prayer languish, the lessons of the past be neglected, the sense of individual responsibility be but slightly felt in the churches, the necessities of our time be not considered, and met with pristine zeal and devotion,—the blessings which our fathers enjoyed, and we greatly need, may in Divine displeasure be withheld."

For the lessons supplied by this retrospect, the reader is referred to the varied contents of this JUBILEE MEMORIAL. We deem it sufficient for our part to submit certain general observations, which did not fall within the scope of the several papers of which this volume is composed, on the history and character of Congregationalism.

II.

Congregationalism and the Reformation.

CONGREGATIONALISM is usually represented as taking its rise in England toward the close of the sixteenth, or the commencement of the seventeenth century. From the early part of the sixteenth century the Reformation had begun to prevail in various countries of Europe. In Britain and the Continent Protestant communities had been formed according to the Presbyterian or Episcopalian model. Congregationalism is consequently represented as a *dissent* from these earlier organizations of the reformed,—as a pestilent and divisive error, which, under the pretext of a thorough reformation, brought weakness and reproach upon Protestantism. This representation is correct, to this extent, that as a distinctly defined polity, directly antagonist to these other ecclesiastical systems,—as a negation of the power claimed by the ruling body, to the exclusion of the Christian people in the churches of the Reformation,—its rise is posterior to theirs. It was an attempted reformation from the abuses and corruptions which the other systems had introduced.

On the other hand, the rise of Congregationalism may be viewed as an attempt to bring the Reformers back to *their own original idea of the church of Christ*;—to that idea which constituted the real

ground on which the battle of their Christian liberties had been successfully fought. According to this view, Congregationalism embodies not so much the *after-thought*, as the *original and essential spirit of the Reformation*.

In support of this representation, the testimony of the Reformers themselves can be largely adduced; from which it will appear, that the first solid footing which the Reformers found in their efforts to emancipate themselves from the yoke of a tyrannical priesthood, was the scriptural truth:—*that Christ's people constitute the real and only priesthood under the new dispensation*.

In virtue of this divine principle, every true disciple was understood to be entitled to keep himself free from the corruptions of a false church, and to secure for himself in secret the spiritual privileges that were denied within its pale. By the same warrant all such disciples might lawfully associate themselves into a society, separate from a false church; and notwithstanding the prohibitions of secular authority, and the fulminations of ecclesiastical wrath, might possess the full powers, exercise all the functions, and enjoy the undiminished privileges of the true church of Christ.

“The idea of a universal priesthood,” says D’Aubigné, “such a living principle among the first Christians, had been re-established by Luther.”* But long before Luther’s day, in a much earlier reformation, the venerated Wycliffe had given wings

* History of the Reformation, iii. 389.

to this same law of Christian liberty. "The reformer took his stand amid the Christian brotherhood of the ages immediately following that of the Apostles, and from that source of instruction, as well as from holy writ, he learned to discard the notion of a church representative, that is, a church consisting of teachers to the exclusion of the taught."*

John Huss, the earliest successor of Wycliffe, "ascended from the idea of the Roman church to the idea of the true church. As Huss, however, retained all the assertions concerning the church made by the Roman Catholics, and applied them to the said community of the elect, *who alone can administer the sacrament in an efficient way*, HIS CHURCH MUST NECESSARILY HAVE ASSUMED THE CHARACTER OF AN ASSOCIATION OF SEPARATISTS."†

From these statements it appears that the earlier Reformation of the fourteenth, and the later of the sixteenth century were characterized by the same fundamental idea, of which we add this additional description: "Protestants *proceeding from the idea*

* Vaughan's Wycliffe, ii. 313; Lewis's Wycliffe; Cunningham's Lives, iii.; Tracts and Treatises of Wycliffe, pp. 259, 27, 29, &c.

† Hase, Kirchengeschichte quoted in Hagenbach's History of Doctrines, §. 187. "The notion of a universal priesthood was propounded by Hugo of St. Victor, as well as by the fore-runners of the Reformation, Wycliffe, Huss, Wessel, and Savonarola. . . . The Waldenses and Bohemian brethren endeavoured in a simpler way and without fanaticism, to return to the foundation laid by the apostles,"—that is, to the great truth of which the practical development is asserted in the quotation in the text.—*Ibid.*

of the spiritual priesthood of all Christians, regarded the clergy not like their opponents as an order of men specifically distinct from the laity, but as the body of the teachers and servants of the church.*

That this was Luther's starting point, and the basis of all the *spiritual* reformation he accomplished, may be abundantly demonstrated. "All Christians," said he, "are, properly speaking, members of the ecclesiastical order, and there is no difference between them, except that they hold different offices."†

"If a few pious laymen were banished to a desert place, and if, not having among them a priest consecrated by a bishop, they should agree to choose one of their own number, married or not, this man would be as truly a priest as if all the bishops in the world had consecrated him. Thus Augustine, Ambrose, and Cyprian were elected."‡

Such sentiments found a very general reception among the adherents of the Reformation. "At that time the most pious men were of opinion that the *ecclesiastical power proceeded from the members of the church.*"§

But unhappily, the great Reformer, who so clearly expounded this law of Christian liberty, overborne by his political connections and aiders, became a party to its violation. Setting out in principle from the democratic, he arrived in fact at the

* Hagenbach, §. 254.

† Ibid. §. 187.

‡ D'Aubigné's *History of the Reformation*, ii. 97.

§ Ibid. iv. 80.

Erastian extreme. "Never, perhaps," says even his admiring biographer, "was there so immense space between the premises laid down by any man and the conduct he adopted." He yielded to "the necessities of the times," as they are called, and gave a constitution to the church, not in harmony with the original and spiritual conceptions of himself and his brother-reformers, but one confessedly accommodated to the position in which the Reformers found themselves, as they thought, inextricably placed. And as the fruit of this memorable error, Protestantism, instead of "purposing the regeneration of Christendom and the conversion of the whole world, shrank back. Protestants sought to settle themselves as comfortably as possible in a few German duchies. This timidity, which has been called prudence, *did immense injury to the Reformation.*"*

The same spiritual discernment, and to a degree the same subsequent inconsistency, and produced by similar causes, were manifested by the Swiss reformer, Zuingle. He applied all that the Scriptures say of the church in general to particular churches. The only church he recognised was 'the assembly of Christians.' "The assembly of believers was, according to Zuingle's principles, the highest power to which there could be an appeal on earth."† The historian naïvely observes, not intending to include his favourite Presbyterianism in the censure which he pronounces upon the Reformer's subsequent incon-

* D'Aubigné's *History of the Reformation*, iv. 84.

† *Ibid.* iii. 244, 245.

sistency, "Zuingle, while appealing to the church, *was careful not to make it too prominent*, and preferred the representative system to the *actual sovereignty of the people*."*

The Reformation-movement in France was quite spontaneous, and independent of that in Saxony and in Switzerland. The following description of the sentiments and practice of the Reformed churches, as distinguished from the Lutheran, may be accepted as an additional attestation of the great law of Christian liberty:—"The Reformed churches, while they maintained the divine appointment of the ministry which some sects deny, *approached nearer* [than the Lutherans] *the primitive condition of the apostolic communities*. From the times of which we are speaking, they recognised and proclaimed that the Christian flocks ought not simply to receive what the pastor gives: that the members of the church, as well as its leaders, possess the key of that treasure whence the latter derive their instruction: that the graces of God, the Spirit of faith, of wisdom, of consolation, of light, are not bestowed on the pastor only: that every man is called upon to employ the gift he has received for the good of all; and that a certain gift, necessary to the edification of the church, may be refused to a minister, and yet granted to one of his flock. *Thus the passive state of the church was then changed into a state of general activity*."†—The same remark applies

* D'Aubigné's History of the Reformation, iii. 288. Hess's Life of Zuingle, 160.

† D'Aubigné's History of the Reformation, iii. 390.

to the Reformation in Hesse,—not second to any in interest, as it was not second in the time of its commencement. The preaching of scriptural truth was in this quarter followed immediately by the formation of churches in accordance with the word of God. It is interesting to examine the first ecclesiastical constitution adopted after the Reformation. Its fundamental principle was the self-government of the church. "On every Sunday"—so one of its articles runs—"let there be in some suitable place an *assembly of all the men who are in the number of the saints*, to regulate with the bishop, according to God's word, all the affairs of the church, and to excommunicate whoever gives occasion of scandal to the church; for the church of Christ has never existed without exercising the power of excommunication."*

It is true, that, in the same constitution, provision is made for a synod for the direction of all the churches in the country. But allowing that to this extent the constitution was Presbyterian in form, the fundamental article, just quoted, demonstrates, that the first unsophisticated dictates of the Reformers' minds, after they have come to the word of God for guidance, is to infuse into the constitution of the Christian church an amount of Congregationalism, which is quite incompatible with the Presbyterian idea, that the church should be governed by a representative body. The autonomy or self-government reposed, by this constitution, in the particular congregations, must have limited the power of a Synod to the giving of

* D'Aubigné's History of the Reformation, iv. 28.

counsel merely—an arrangement to which, more than once in their history, Congregational churches have consented, as perfectly in harmony with their fundamental principle of Independency.*

But the Scottish Reformer, Knox, before yet he had adopted, in the society of Calvin, the Genevan model which he introduced into his native country, himself acknowledged, in a most unequivocal manner, the fundamental principle of Congregationalism.—The garrison of St. Andrews, pleased with young Knox's talents, united in a call to him to become their minister, as colleague of John Rough, who at the time held that office. "Accordingly," says Dr. M'Crie, "on a day fixed for the purpose, Rough preached a sermon on the election of ministers, in which *he declared the power which a congregation, however small, had over any one in whom they perceived gifts suited to the office.*" Thus a body of professed Christians unite themselves, of their own right, into a "Congregation," and call John Knox to be their minister. He accepts the call as from the "Congregation" of Christ, authorized to lay this charge upon him. As the pastor of this Congregational church he makes "full proof of his ministry." "His labours were so successful during the few months that he preached at St. Andrews, that besides the garrison in the Castle, a great number of the inhabitants of the town renounced Popery, and made profession of the Protestant faith by participating of the

* Neal's Hist. of Puritans, iv. 176. Neal's Hist. of New England, ii. 40, 805. Scot. Cong. Mag., 1848, p. 167.

Lord's Supper"—the first time it was regularly observed by the reformed in Scotland. Thus the self-formed and self-governed "Congregation" proceed to exercise all the functions of a church. That John Knox held this little society in the honour due to its divine institution, appears from his not long after dedicating a work to "his best-beloved Brethren of the *Congregation* of the Castle of St. Andrews." Even his biographer, with all his Presbyterian attachments, observes:—"I have little doubt that he looked upon the charge which he received at St. Andrews" (which was really the call of a congregational church) "as principally constituting his call to the ministry."*

No equally satisfactory proof of this point can be drawn from the Reformation in England, because the event so called proceeded from no religious principle whatever; and while it undoubtedly afforded a certain degree of relief from the yoke of Rome, the religious element was never even for a moment, during the reigns of Henry and Elizabeth, released from the jealous control of the secular defenders of the Protestant faith.

But that excellent prince Edward VI. is understood to have inclined to a more thorough reformation, and to have been restrained far within the limits of his wishes. The same thing may be said of some of his leading advisers. Even during his reign there are traces of assemblies seeking in separation the spiritual liberty denied in the State-church,—show-

* M'Crie's *Life of Knox*, p. 40.

ing that the idea of spiritual reformation and true Christian liberty was thus early formed.*

It was, therefore, with good reason that the Christian people on the Continent of Europe, seeing their leaders surrender, under the influence of secular connections, their precious spiritual liberties, cried out: "Our cause is betrayed; the liberty is taken away that Jesus had given us."† From that moment, in the judgment of many pious Christians, the glory of the Reformation had departed. The word of God, the charter of their spiritual rights, was no longer its sole law. The tradition of men was a Popish defilement which they could not endure to attach to their divine faith. Adopted into a national constitution, the religion of Jesus Christ was no longer in the hands of his disciples, as its sole administrators. The worldly and unbelieving had the same place and provision in the Church as the godly. It was no longer a Christian society, but a national institute. The most scriptural convictions of the true believer were checked and overborne by the secular and profane. "The ancient ways of the Lord," said a distinguished Separatist, "are the only true ways. Whatsoever is second or diverse is new and false. This I say, because both these factions of our pontifical and *reforming* priests have sought rather to the broken pits and dry cisterns of men's inventions for their direction and ground-work than unto the pure fountain of God's word." The same

* Price's Hist. of Prot. Nonconformity, i. 208.

† D'Aubigné's History of the Reformation, iv. 86.

faithful reprovcr complains that they "reject all claim the people can make . . . alleging I wot not how many politic inconveniences in way of bar."*

Turning against the Reformers themselves the weapons which they had employed against the Papacy, they argued that their Christian liberties were as truly betrayed by delegating them into the hands of a Protestant as of a Popish clergy. They denied not that there might be an advantage in a change of masters; but it was servitude after all, and not as they had hoped, the liberty of Christ.†

But it is needless to multiply proofs. The Reformers themselves acknowledged, that circumstances prevented their carrying out in all their integrity their original convictions.‡

No doubt can reasonably exist after the foregoing quotations, which might be greatly multiplied, that an original and pervading idea of the Reformation was, that the church is the assembly of believers, and that their Christian liberty is secured only as they exercise their spiritual functions for themselves. As little can it be doubted, that in the national constitutions given to the churches of the reformed, this original idea was departed from. And we think it can hardly be denied, that Congregationalism more than any other ecclesiastical system has preserved

* Barrowe in Hanbury's Memorials, i. 47.

† Brook's Mem. of Life and Writings of Thomas Cartwright, p. 307. Price's Hist. of Protestant Nonconformity, i. 208.

‡ D'Aubigné's History of the Reformation, iv. 35, 36; iii. 288.

this idea,—retaining in the hands of the assembly of the disciples, and not in those of official functionaries, those functions which, all *THEN* avowed, belong essentially to the Christian people; and which, comparatively few *now* will deny, belong to them *in the last resort*. Is it not, therefore, on sufficient grounds, and in no spirit of presumptuous boasting, that we say of Congregationalism—that it embodies **THE ORIGINAL AND ESSENTIAL SPIRIT OF THE REFORMATION?**

If this were a question of names, whether Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Zuingli, and Knox, belonged to us; or if it served merely to determine whether Congregationalism took its rise *in* the Reformation, or *after* it, it would little concern us to determine it one way or other. But as supplying a presumptive argument in favour of the scriptural truth and spiritual worth of this system, the inquiry is of high importance. For unless the sentiments of the Reformers have been misapprehended, their first steps into spiritual freedom consisted of an avowal of the great truth of which Congregationalism is the development. All the *spiritual* liberty secured by the Reformation, was derived from the simple provisions of this divine polity. *It* alone has preserved the liberties of the Christian people, according to the original conception of them in that hour of spiritual emancipation. *It* is the sole security which the Christian people can have against the hierarchical domination which the Reformation destroyed. While its easy adoption in the most trying conjunctures of the church's affairs,—the strong defence which it

offers against the assaults of violence and the arts of policy,—its integrity and maturity in times of weakness and trial,—seem to mark it out as the fittest organism for that gospel, in the diffusion of which “the foolish things of the world are to confound the wise, the weak things to confound the things that are mighty, and base things, and things which are despised, and things which are not, are to bring to nought things that are.”

Well-informed persons are aware, that many individuals of the highest reputation, removed from every suspicion of partiality, have, notwithstanding their adherence to systems antagonist to the Congregational, candidly acknowledged the striking resemblance which Congregationalism bears to the institutions of the apostolic age.* The views of Isaac Barrow, one of the brightest ornaments of the Anglican church, are so admirable that the reader will thank us for quoting them:—“Each church separately did order its own affairs, without recourse to others, except for charitable advice or relief in cases of extraordinary difficulty or urgent need. Each church was endowed with a perfect liberty and a full authority, without dependence or subordination to others, to govern its own members, to manage its own affairs, to decide controversies and causes incident among themselves, without allowing appeals or rendering accounts to

* Campbell's *Lectures on Eccles. Hist.*, i. 43. Mosheim, i. 99. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, ii. 15, p. 324. Milner's *Church History*, Cent. 3, c. 20. Whately's *Kingdom of Christ*, pp. 129, 130. Neander's *Gen. Hist. of the Christian Religion*, i. 250. Gieseler's *Eccles. History*, i. § 20.

others. This appeareth by the apostolical writings of St. Paul and St. John to single churches, wherein they are supposed able to exercise spiritual power for establishing decency, removing disorders, correcting offences, deciding causes," &c.*

Now it is no small corroboration of the argument drawn from the inspired model, to find the simple provisions of this spiritual polity commending themselves to the illuminated, and as yet unbiassed, judgments of the great and good in different eras of the Church's history.

The most zealous Presbyterian, unable to deny these facts in the history of the Reformation, can only argue—that it is unreasonable to infer from "the case of necessity,"—from the first beginnings of religious Reformation in any particular country, the form which the constitution of the Church ought permanently to assume. For "undoubtedly," says he, "the Church must possess in itself the power of doing all that is necessary to the continuance of its own existence."† But unfortunately for this line of defence, the Congregational sentiments were, in most of the instances adduced, the result of inquiry into God's word; they constituted "the method of precept" as far as the Reformers were able to discover the divine will. While by the acknowledgment of the Presbyterian historian of the Reformation the "case of necessity" pleaded by the Reformers was, the adoption of a

* Discourse concerning the Unity of the Church, pp. 496, 525.

† Hetherington's Hist. of Westm. Assembly of Divines, p. 200.

constitution more complicated than that which they had derived from the word of God—a constitution with less of the popular element than the scriptural constitution of the church contains—a constitution in which “the actual sovereignty of the people” was not “too prominent,” being accommodated to the taste of political adherents, and the alliance of political governments, by means of the “representative system.”*

Many causes contributed to the early and general departure from views held with so much apparent distinctness by the early Reformers. They owed their personal safety, and much favourable consideration to their cause, to the patronage and assistance of those princes who sided with the Reformation. Accustomed to the alliance betwixt the spiritual and secular under the Papacy, these princes proceeded to act for the benefit of the reformed whom they had adopted, much in the way they had acted in the service of the church which they had abandoned. Many, too, adhered to the Reformation from merely political motives, and in a variety of ways political interests were mixed up with its progress. It more than once occurred that the people were ignorant and unspiritual, while the prince was enlightened and perhaps religious. It was not easy to refuse an alliance proffered under such circumstances; especially when there existed in the minds of the Reformers themselves very indis-

* “Presbytery Examined,” p. 47, by the Duke of Argyll, in which the representative constitution of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland is attributed to the national character of the Church, and is called a “secular” principle.

inct views of the relation in which the church in a nation should stand to the nation itself. The result was, that the church and the nation came to be virtually identified. The Reformers were too discerning and too spiritual to be insensible to the evils incurred by their political alliances. But they either did not discover how to escape from their false position, or were daunted by the dangers to which the new movement would be exposed¹ by any attempt to act independently of their powerful associates.

The external order to which they offered a sacrifice so costly, became a snare and stumbling-block. For of such order as they desired, uniformity is the consummation. This vision of false unity in the church operated as a spell upon minds otherwise enlightened; and, under pretext of preserving and perfecting the Reformation, arrested its progress, and perpetuated forms of spiritual thralldom which another series of similar revolutions may be necessary to sweep away.* Every symptom of dissent, albeit but a return to their own first and cherished ideas, became a source of alarm to the Reformers. Liberty of conscience was shackled in its very birth-time, by the connivance of those heroic and honoured men who had been its ablest advocates. Dis-

* "Presbytery examined," p. 68. An essay abounding with remarkable excellencies, from which many quotations might be made, showing how largely the minds of the early Scottish Reformers were imbued with a thoroughly *popular* idea of the church,—the representative organization being an after-thought, forced on them by the national shape which the movement came to assume, pp. 37, 47, 50.

appointment and vexation brought many minds to phrenzy. And the acts of the fanatical and maniac Anabaptists were exultingly pointed to as the effects of dissent from the order established. How much more correctly might they have been held up as the cruel triumph of those who had first kindled the desire of Christian liberty, and then placed it under the arrest of secular authority!

Had the original ideas of the Reformation been preserved inviolate, worldly powers would never, to say the least, have been admitted to such a share in the affairs of the church. The Reformation would have fulfilled its early promise, and long ere this time the nations have been rejoicing in emancipation from the interference and usurpation of secular powers,—a rest into which the churches of Christendom seem impatiently longing to enter.

III.

The Influence of Congregationalism on the Religious Liberties of England.

IN England, the Reformation under Henry VIII. had as little as can well be conceived of a religious character. Yet it was scarcely possible that the spirit of enquiry stimulated by the events occurring on the Continent, and by the perusal, however stealthily, of the Holy Scriptures, should not expose the utter falsity of the pretensions of the reformed Church of England to be a church of Christ. The ceremonies of her worship and the vestments of her priesthood were designedly popish, that the religious sentiments of the people might be in the least possible degree interfered with. Of those who censured her manifold errors there were some who desired and expected her reformation by the removal of the grosser parts of her ritual; and some who, not discerning in her Romish ritual, her secular constitution, and her pervading corruptions, a single feature of the Church of Christ, resolved to separate from her communion. The latter—the Separatists—were Congregational in sentiment and practice. Hated and persecuted by the dominant hierarchy, they had the additional unhappiness of being discountenanced and reproached by their Puritan brethren, who saw the anti-Christian errors of the

Church of England, but were not prepared to separate from her pale. But deeply as they were reproached, and unjustly as their reproach has been perpetuated to this day, as if they were possessed of a spirit of strife and uncharitableness,—which palliates, if it does not justify, the persecuting violence under which they suffered,—this honour, at least, belongs to them, of first discerning the incurable extent of those corruptions which their more moderate brethren afterwards acknowledged; and of taking that stern but consistent course of separation, in which their brethren had afterwards to follow them.

Party spirit thinks it has said enough to discredit Congregational principles, when it traces their rise in England to Robert Browne, and the Separatists with whom he was associated. Had his character been more spotless, his temper more meek, and his conduct less dishonoured by inconsistency, Congregationalists would have less sensitively shrunk from the connection, and their enemies been less zealous to fix this paternity upon them.

But what if it were true? Has the scriptural authority of these principles suffered any essential detriment from the fickleness or fault of their human advocate? Are the principles of the Reformation less valuable because of the time-serving timidity of Erasmus? or because of the harshness of temper, intolerance of sentiment, and superstitious credulity of some of the great Reformers? "The principles," says a candid historian, "of which the intrepid assertion had alone given him distinction, lay deeply rooted in the public mind; and, as they had not

derived life from his support, they did not suffer from his apostasy."* But the restless and pugnacious temper of this man, combined with his infamous apostasy in returning to minister at the altar of the Established Church which he had so unscrupulously denounced as no church; and the strenuous repudiation, by the early Congregationalists, of the nickname of Brownists, have attached an unwarrantable stigma to the principles which he advocated. With the exception of the heated temper of the Separatists, and the unexceptionably hard terms employed by them against the Church of England and other secularised churches, as anti-Christian confederacies and no true churches, there is not any material difference between the principles of Browne and those of Robinson, whom, more than any other, Congregationalists venerate as their founder; and whose name may be placed with honour beside the brightest and best of patriots, heroes, and Reformers. The "middle way" of Congregationalism is in principle the same as the Brownist extreme, only more chastened in temper, and more spiritual in character.† If the Congregationalists allowed that there were true Christians in the Church of England, they did no more than the Brownists themselves expressly admitted.‡ And if they went further, and recognised the ecclesiastical orders of the Church of England,

* Bancroft's History of the United States, p. 117.

† Vaughan's Memorials, chap. xx. Price's History of Prot. Nonconf. i. 816.

‡ Barrow's Apology and Defence. Vaughan's History of England, p. 125.

and recognised it as in any sense a church of Christ (and it is the "head and front" of the Brownists' uncharitableness that they would not), it may be questioned whether their greater courtesy does not involve a concession, which the Congregationalism of the 19th century, with all its liberalism and light, would scarcely be prepared to sanction.*

The faults of temper, and the defect of charity, in the Brownists, have been most unreasonably exaggerated. Truth requires us to say, that to minds really enlightened as were those of the Separatists, the Reformation in England, considered as a spiritual reformation, could not fail to appear contemptible. And if any thing was fitted to infuse acerbity into their just indignation, it was the conduct of their brethren, who, constrained as well as themselves to testify against her unscriptural worship, should have waited for their Christian liberty as a boon at the hand of the earthly magistrate instead of taking it, as the Separatists did, at the hand of their divine Lord and King. It was scarcely to be expected that men should speak with all the meekness and patience that could be desired, when suffering the ruthless persecutions of a secularised church, and loaded at the same time with wounding misrepresentations by Christian brethren who ought to have been their fellow-martyrs for the truth; and whose moderation or timidity in not forsaking the

* For the claims of the Church of England to be held as a church of Christ, see the remarkable work of the Hon. and Rev. Baptist Noel, on the Union of the Church with the State.

church whose corruptions they condemned, seemed to afford a warrant for the malignant persecution of those who acted a bolder and more consistent course. The protestations of loyalty, proceeding from the prisons in which the Brownists were immured, and the scaffolds on which their blood was shed, for the crime of absenting themselves from the parish churches and forming Christian societies according to the apostolic model, at the very time that their Puritan brethren, dissenters in heart, as well as they, from the Church of England, were in hopes of favour and indulgence from Parliament, are painfully suggestive of the kind of irritation to which these faithful men were subjected. When the moderate Puritans were themselves charged with factious pride and associated with Anabaptist fanatics, they could not fail to remember how they had countenanced the calumny against men as innocent and as loyal as themselves. Honoured martyrs for the truth! Barrowe, Greenwood, Penry, Brownists though they were, we make our boast of them. Protestantism had never more honourable sacrifices. The spirituality of their character, the scripturality of their creed, the apostolicity of the ecclesiastical polity which they advocated, the steadfast meekness with which they suffered death, place them in the first rank of Christian martyrs.

Driven by Protestant persecutors and Puritan approvers from the land of their nativity, the Brownist exiles find a shelter in Amsterdam, and there fulfil their mission by exhibiting the Scriptural constitution of the Church of Christ. The eyes of Christendom

are upon them, but it is to watch for their halting. The excessive satisfaction afforded by the dissensions which unhappily rent this persecuted Christian society breathes little of the charity that "thinketh no evil." Excuse might be made for the Baillies and Rutherfordds and Edwardses for the extravagant conclusions which they drew from these unhappy incidents. But the party-spirit which can be excused in the 17th century amid the solitudes of a struggle which, for the intense passions which it awakened and the tremendous issues depending on it, has never been equalled in the history of these nations, becomes contemptible in the 19th, when it points to these distractions as demonstrating the impracticability of the congregational polity.

Would it be unreasonable to allow that these exiles had just extricated "this more excellent way" from the perversion which a Protestant Reformation had put upon the word of God; that while sufficiently persuaded of the truth of the general principles by which they were to regulate their procedure, they had, by continued inquiry and experimental use, to acquaint themselves with many details; that the remembrance of the galling bondage from which they had escaped, tempted them into a zeal for individual liberty of speech and action in the church, which was scarcely compatible with ecclesiastical rule and unity; that they fell into the very likely error of putting too much trust in the organic excellence of their principles, apart from the spirit of lowliness and meekness which is their main-spring, and constitutes their real power; that no friendly spirit among the va-

rious groups of spectators ever suggested charitable consideration of their inexperience and their temptations; that, regarded with suspicion and treated with coldness even by the people who afforded them shelter, some of them may have been led to strain their principles beyond their legitimate applications, and to glory in becoming even "more vile" in the eyes of those who unjustly despised them?

And who are they who will point the finger of reproach at them, and lift the first stone against them? Shall the serfs of a State Church bless themselves for their exemption from dissensions which were placed beyond their reach, as truly as its more desirable opposite, spiritual unity, by the secular chains which they wore?

Shall the moderate Puritans, bound together for the time, by the not very lofty hope of toleration and comprehension within a corrupt church; and by the fear, lest any acts of too manful boldness should disturb their present quiet, or damage their uncertain prospects; while their boasted Presbyterian polity is either kept in entire abeyance, or adopted under names and forms scarcely creditable to their honesty, certainly not remarkably demonstrative of a "conscience toward God?"

Are Presbyterians or Episcopalians willing that the divisions of another company of exiles at Frankfort,—divisions certainly not less puerile or more defensible than those of Amsterdam,—shall be held as proving the incapability of the church to conduct her affairs without the restraints and authority of the magistrate as her foster-father and head?

Or will the Presbyterians of the Church of Scotland allow that the incessant divisions which have existed within their bounds as a national church from its first establishment until now, prove the utter incompatibility of its Presbyterian polity with the true order and peace of any nation? Yet the argument is as sound in the one case as the other. If they will not, then let the dignified apology of the exiles themselves be accepted: that they had never rested the authority of their principles upon the fidelity and discretion with which they were able to exemplify them; that their misconduct might dishonour themselves, but the Scriptural basis of their system remained intact.*

After all, a church which could boast of Ainsworth, the Rabbi of his age, and of Canne, whose bible has so greatly contributed to the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures,—a church which continued under a succession of pastors and teachers for above a hundred years,† in a land to whose language and habits its members were strangers, has a reputation which the party-spirit either of that or this day cannot seriously affect.

What would have been the loss to Christian truth and liberty had these faithful and suffering separatists been of the moderate temper, as it is described, of the Puritans who inclined to the Presbyterian model, we do not venture to calculate. Beyond all question, their martyr-like consistency and heroic for-

* Ainsworth's Counterpoison.

† Neal's History of New England, I. 72.

titude helped to prevent, what was but too likely at the time, the absorption of dissent into the Establishment under the vain and never-to-be-fulfilled hope that more conciliatory counsels and a more tolerant administration would be adopted by the dominant church. The conduct of these exiles kept faithful to their conscientious convictions, a band of noble men, who, after suffering in exile, returned to England, to bear part in the endeavour, not altogether unsuccessful, of breaking the yoke of Prelacy from the neck of the English nation.

It was in 1616 that the first Congregational Church was formed under the pastoral care of Henry Jacobs. By this is meant, that this society was in spirit, as well as in form and principles, the prototype of those bearing the name Congregational from that period to the present day. We do not forget, however, that its principles in germ constituted the spirit of the Reformation; and that they had an organic existence in the Brownist churches, and in Christian societies of even an earlier date,*—some of them distinguished by Baptist sentiments, but strictly Congregational in their order and discipline.†

But the Congregationalists, like their predecessors the Brownists, are driven into exile. Under dangers which fill us with admiration of their constancy, they escape from England, and find a settlement in Leyden. Under the pastorate of John Robinson, the little society enjoyed, in peace and

* Stoughton's *Spiritual Heroes*.

† Price's *History of Protestant Nonconformity*, i. 91.

unity, their dearly cherished privileges. But in a foreign land, into which they were admitted only as a retreat for themselves, the increase of their body and the extension of their principles were scarcely to be expected. Hence, out of a strong desire that the institutions of Christ, in their spirituality, might be preserved in the world, came the proposed emigration into the wilds of America. We need not repeat the now familiar story of the embarkation of the pilgrim fathers, destined to be yet more familiar, as the memories of holy men emerge from the load of obloquy under which they have long lain, and the divine principles for which they suffered find more general acceptance. The blessing and the patriarchal charge which they received from the sainted Robinson will rise to the memory of the reader; their parting, their dangers and delays, their hardships and sufferings in that strange, wild home of the western forest.

We cannot fail to mark by what a singular Providence this little band of exiles was made to contribute to the religious liberties of England, to an extent beyond what their position or their numbers gave any warrant to anticipate. Had they remained in Holland, who would have cast into the virgin soil of America the seeds of liberty and truth? Had they all emigrated, England would have lost the services of that band of great-hearted men, who, during the Civil War, the Commonwealth, and the Protectorate, saved England from the yoke of ecclesiastical domination;—who, improving that hour as England's sowing-time of freedom, deposited in the national mind those imperishable truths which have

already hastened the progress, and shall ultimately secure the triumph, of **FREEDOM IN RELIGION**—freedom from the domination both of secular and ecclesiastical power. Had they returned earlier, impatient of their banishment, they could not have brought to the great struggle, in which they bore a part so conspicuous, such disciplined minds, such matured views, such heroic steadfastness of purpose; and could neither have won their honours so valiantly nor worn them so meekly.

We now pass forward to the reign of the first Charles; and see men in England, having the faith and temper of the Leyden exiles and the Pilgrim Fathers, becoming hopeless of relief; attempting, like them, to flee from their inhospitable fatherland; but denied even the poor immunity of voluntary exile. But it is not long till the arm of tyranny is broken, and the exiles are returning from Holland and other places of refuge, ready once more to plant in their beloved country those divine institutions, on which ecclesiastical despotism had set its foot. A venerable Assembly of Divines, not unmixed with laymen of rank, and learning, and piety, hold their sessions in Westminster, their commission being to “consult and advise” how “such a government shall be settled in the church as may be agreeable to God’s holy Word.” In that large convention there is a small, a very small party who are of Congregational sentiments,—consisting of not more than eleven ministers out of the 121 who formed the clerical part of the Assembly, and a similar proportion of the 30 laymen who formed the other part. But a noble ambition filled

the minds of these few great-hearted men—to maintain the rights of conscience, to plead for liberty, not to themselves alone, but to every man, to worship God according to his conscience. Their spirits were filled with jubilancy as they begirt themselves for this high vocation. Their task indeed was full of danger. Their party was small, and the times were troublous. They had no security of toleration to themselves,—indeed the constitution and temper of that Presbyterian Assembly, and their subsequent experience, showed how little security they had of exemption from active persecution on account of their sentiments. But to the persecuted and the banished it was gladdening once more to tread their native soil. England had taken a bold step toward reformation and liberty. The general ear was open to them. They seemed to be offering counsel to an inquiring people; and they rejoiced to exhibit their system as alone capable of supplying the spiritual necessities of the church, and alone consistent with the safety and peace and liberty of the nation.

It would divert us from the specific object which we have in view, and for which alone we refer to their labours, to detail, as we could wish, their struggles in that memorable convention. Their tenets met with a uniformly unfriendly reception in that House. For twenty and even for forty long sessions would the five Dissenting brethren, as they were called, on whom the principal labours of the party devolved, protract the Assembly's debates. The imputation of motives the most factious, the most overbearing treatment on the part of some of the majority, the knowledge of

the dangers which they incurred should the political power of their opponents be equal to their preponderating weight in that Assembly, did not abate their steadfastness. Their greatest enemies confessed that, "truly, if the cause were good, the men had plenty of learning, with eloquence, and, above all, boldness and stiffness to make it out." They did not hesitate to avail themselves of every dialectical expedient, which, if it did not secure success, at least delayed the imposition of Presbyterian uniformity upon the English nation,—a yoke scarcely less oppressive than that under which these men had themselves suffered so much, and which the nation had just thrown off. When, overborne by numbers, they would be no longer listened to in the Assembly, they made their appeal to Parliament, seeking the protection of the civil power, when reason and Scripture did not serve for a sanctuary from persecution. When the ear of the Assembly was entirely closed against them, they spoke, by their Apologetic Narration, in the ear of Parliament, of England, and of posterity, their imperishable pleadings for liberty of conscience. To the utmost limit of conscience they met the views of the Presbyterians, and silently consented to much that they could not approve; "but if," said Jeremiah Burroughes, one of the gentlest and most candid of men, "their congregations might not be exempted from that coercive power of the elasses (presbyteries); if they might not have liberty to govern themselves in their own way, as long as they behaved peaceably towards the civil magistrate, they were resolved to suffer, or to go to some other part of the world,

where they might enjoy their liberty. But while men think there is no way of peace but by forcing all to be of the same mind; while they think the civil sword is an ordinance of God to determine all controversies of divinity, and that it must needs be attended with fines and imprisonment to the disobedient; while they apprehend there is no medium between a strict uniformity and a general confusion of all things; while these sentiments prevail, there must be a base subjection of men's consciences to slavery, a suppression of much truth, and great disturbances in the Christian world."

This will suffice to show the nature of the service which the Congregationalists of that day rendered to the cause of truth and liberty.

About this period the destinies of Britain were about to be placed in the hands of a Congregationalist—the man, Oliver Cromwell—England's greatest monarch, who shed the genial light of civil and religious freedom over an empire, which the vigour of his government, not more than the example of his piety, was lifting into enduring greatness.

The political and the religious Independents should, in general, be viewed apart; but, for our purpose, we shall combine their doctrinal pleadings in the Westminster Assembly, and the civil administration of Cromwell, which their principles are understood to have animated and directed. We pronounce no indiscriminating encomium either upon their character or their acts. We do not contend that they were entirely free from the errors of their time, respecting the part which the magis-

trate might lawfully take in religious affairs. We care not to arrogate for Congregationalists the honour of being the first to define the magistrate's province, although to Congregational Baptists this honour does belong.* We pretend not that the conduct of Congregationalists in England or in the New England settlement was absolutely consistent with their principles. It is enough to show, as we have done, that religious liberty was vindicated more generously and comprehensively by them than by any others: that their reasonings in its vindication have received confirmation by an ever-widening adoption of them from that day to this: that the benefits of civil and religious freedom were more amply enjoyed under the shadow of Congregational influence than in any other position of British affairs: and that such a result is only what may be expected to arise from the general adoption of their ecclesiastical views. This argument shall be stated by an unprejudiced mind, whose utterance all must respect:

“They (the Independents) disclaimed the qualifications of ‘national’ as repugnant to the nature of a ‘church.’ *The religion of the Independents could not, without destroying its nature, be established by law.* They never could aspire to more than religious liberty, and they accordingly have the honour to be the first, and long the only Christian community who collectively adopted that sacred principle. It is true that in the beginning they adopted the

* Price's History of Protestant Nonconformity, i. 520.

pernicious and inconsistent doctrine of limited toleration, excluding Catholics as idolaters; and, in New England, where the great majority were of their persuasion, punishing, even capitally, dissenters from opinions which they accounted fundamental. *But, as intolerance could promote no interest of theirs, real or imaginary, their true principles finally worked out the stain of these dishonourable exceptions.* The government of Cromwell, more influenced by them than by any other persuasion, made as near approaches to general toleration as public prejudice would endure; and Sir Henry Vane, an Independent, was probably the first who laid down with perfect precision the inviolable rights of conscience, and the exemption of religion from all civil authority.*

Since the Revolution-settlement England has been reaping, and is destined still more largely to enjoy, the fruits of these heroic struggles for civil liberty. After the Restoration, the principles and works of the Commonwealth seemed to perish. But St. Bartholomew's day, the Revolution of 1688, the Toleration Act, the Abolition of Tests, the Relief of Roman Catholic Disabilities, &c., attest how deeply implanted in the British mind were these principles of religious liberty. We ask, that befitting honour be paid to those whose principles contributed, more than any other single cause, to secure the civil, and, through them, the religious liberties of England.

* Sir James M'Intosh's Historical Fragment.

IV.

Early Traces of Congregationalism in Scotland.

ABOUT the period to which the concluding portion of the last section refers, manifestations of a very alarming kind presented themselves to the Scottish Kirk. In different parts of the country fellowship-meetings were held, which were declared by the ecclesiastical authorities to be "unnecessary," "*savouring of Brownism*," and tending to set aside the claims of a regular ministry. They were forbidden, except as they were composed of the members of *one family only*. As was to be desired, this Act of Assembly had no effect, except to confirm those who "inclined towards the Independent, sectarian, fanatic ways." In 1642, for example, one Ferrendale, is 'trapped' in Aberdeen, preaching at night with closed doors. Others are brought before the church-courts for "dishaunting the parish kirk;" having their morning and evening devotions within their own house; and this secret preaching is called "Nocturnal doctrine or Brownisme."* The result of these things is, that, not long after, several Christian men and women in the town of Aberdeen "found themselves obliged to endeavour to have the ordinances admin-

* Spalding's History of the Troubles, p. 303.

istered in a more pure way, than there was any hope ever to attain to have them in the national way." *

Certain persons of high reputation and considerable influence in that same quarter are about this time proposing to secede from the Established Church of Scotland. The sinful "mixtures" of the "precious men" with "a profane mixed multitude" wound their spirits. The Lord seems to be calling his people to look more narrowly than before to two things: "*The Constitution of the Church, and the Government thereof.*" "To us it seems," say they, "for aught we can search in the Word, that none should be admitted as constituent members of a visible church, but such as with a profession of the truth join a blameless and gospel-like behaviour; as they may be esteemed in a rational judgment of charity, believers, and their children. *Such were the churches founded by the Apostles, which ought to be patterns for us*, as appears by the titles given to them,—saints, sanctified, justified, purchased by the blood of Christ," &c.

In defence of their separation they say, "to talk of purging (the national church from its corrupt 'mixtures') seems to us but a specious notion to entangle our spirits and keep us from duty."

Such may be accepted as a specimen of the conventicles which, especially from the time of Cromwell's invasion, were scattered throughout Scotland. The restoration of the second Charles, among its

† Covenanters of the North, by Robert King, p. 318.

other direful deeds, destroyed these germinations of a spiritual life in our country ; and the iron rule of James completed the horrid work.

We are now carried forward to the commencement of the 18th century, when we find the National Covenants—most fitting adjuncts of a State-church—producing on another mind similar effects to those which have just been illustrated in the case of Alexander Jaffray and his associates toward the middle of the preceding century. It was in 1728 that John Glas, minister of Tealing, lifted his solitary testimony to Jesus, “the King of Martyrs,” as having instituted not a political or national church, but a kingdom not of this world ; and with a perspicuity which cannot be exceeded, and a steadfastness which religion only could impart, maintained ecclesiastical principles strictly Congregational.

“Q. 15. (of the Queries put to Mr. Glas by the Synod of Angus and Mearns, 16th April, 1728.) Is it your opinion that there is no warrant for a National Church under the New Testament? Or not?

“A. It is my opinion ; for I can see no churches instituted by Christ in the New Testament, beside the universal, but *Congregational churches*,” &c.

“Q. 17. Is it your opinion that the body of believers or church-members have a right to determine the admission or non-admission of persons to the Lord’s table, together with the ministers and elders? Or not?

“A. None can be admitted to communion in the Lord’s Supper with a congregation of Christ, *without*

the consent of that congregation, and there must be a profession of mutual brotherly love in them that partake together in that ordinance."

"Q. 19. Is it your opinion that a single congregation of believers, with their pastor, are not under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction and authority of superior church judicatures, nor censurable by them, either as to doctrine, worship, or practice? Or not?"

"A. A congregation or church of Jesus Christ, with its presbytery, is, in its discipline, subject to no jurisdiction under heaven."*

The inconsiderable number of the churches which bear his name, their unprogressive character, their exclusive and almost hostile temper toward other Christian sects, and the divergence of their views of saving faith, &c., from the views generally entertained by evangelical Christians—a divergence greatly exaggerated by the pugnacious spirit in which it was promulged—have led even candid inquirers greatly to underrate the favourable influence which Glas exerted upon the religious liberties of his country.

Undoubtedly the death-blow was given to the National Covenants by his single hand. For a time, a feeble protestation in their behalf was maintained, both by the Establishment and the Seceders. But Scotland's idol, once thrown upon its face and mutilated, could never recover its ancient homage. The Establishment, deprived of the Covenant, was shorn of half its strength. From the moment a State-

* Glas's Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Controversy about the National Covenants, p. 182.

church becomes tolerant, or abates a jot of its bond, the seeds of its decline begin to germinate; and secessions, dissents, and disruptions make up the story of its troubled life. The secessions which not long after Glas's expulsion from the Establishment took place in Scotland, are by candid historians traced, in no small measure, to the stirring of men's minds, and the diffusion of scriptural truth by means of the principles of Glas. The approximation, to which, in several parts of this volume reference is made, of all religious bodies in this country, if not to correcter views of the rights of the Christian people, at least to a more liberal infusion of the popular influence into their affairs, may be in no small degree due to Glas's labours. For there is a silent and invisible operation of such views, how obscure soever the party may be that entertain them, which gradually prepares the mind of the community to receive truths which, on their first announcement, they rejected with dislike. Such an influence the Scottish Congregational churches have been widely exerting on the religious communities around them, as is generously acknowledged by some of the greatest and best of those who differ from their polity as a whole; and a like honour is pre-eminently due to John Glas, the earliest, boldest, and ablest of Scottish expounders of Congregationalism as the ecclesiastical polity of Scripture.

The same line of remark applies to the Old, or Scots Independents, who are sometimes also known by the name of their amiable and excellent Father, David Dale. If to Glas and his party belong the honour

of maintaining the constitutional rights of the Christian people, to the Old Independents we owe the practical development of the inner life of the church of Christ—the Christian fellowship of the church. For this was exhibited by them free from the harsh and uncharitable spirit which vitiated the example of the Glasites.

James Smith, minister at Newburn, and Robert Ferrier, minister at Largo, began, about the year 1768, to discover that the Westminster Confession of Faith, which they had subscribed as ministers of the Church of Scotland, abounded with doctrines subversive of the nature of Christ's kingdom and the gospel thereof." Their consciences allowing them to remain no longer in that connexion, they withdrew, along with a few others like-minded belonging to each of their congregations, and assembled together as a church in a house built for them at Balchristie.*

At the very same time, Messrs. Dale, Paterson, Alexander, &c., in Glasgow, began "to see that the kingdom of the clergy, under whatever denomination, and the kingdom of Christ were as opposite as light and darkness; that the Christian brotherhood and brotherly love so much insisted on in the word of God, and exemplified in the New Testament scriptures, were incompatible with the Presbyterian system; that the Lord's Supper and a Presbyterian Sacrament were very distinct things.

* Historical Sketches of the Rise of the Scots Old Independents, &c., vi.

They now began to observe to one another that it appeared from the New Testament that the Lord's Supper should be observed every first day of the week; that this was a principal part of that day's service; and that those who came together to break bread should be known to each other as brethren by a joint profession of the faith.* The parties in Glasgow, and those in Fife, having simultaneously and independently arrived at the same conclusions, established a union betwixt the two churches which they had respectively formed. Such is the rise of the Scots Independents.

Their views are very ably stated in a pamphlet published at the time.† They can find, in the New Testament, no Church courts; no presbytery, except such as is settled in every particular church; no church representative or even church collective, *i. e.*, several congregations in a province or nation constituting one church. They consider each particular congregation as forming a complete church, independent of every other congregation; and having Jesus Christ as their head, complete in themselves. But these independent congregations "are called to correspond with one another in love, even to the asking of advice." They declare the manner of communion in the national church to be unscriptural. And after quoting several passages of Scripture requiring purity of communion, they say: "We found

* Historical Sketches, &c.

† The Case of James Smith, &c., truly represented and defended. 1768.

it upon trial quite impracticable, in connexion with that church, to pay due regard to these and the like scriptures, and were therefore inclinable to be disengaged, that we might be at liberty to conform more to what appears of great importance in religion: and that we might be under less restraint in reducing to practice the whole instituted discipline in Christ's house in connexion with such as shall be found by us like-minded." *

Various causes have hindered the multiplication and increase of these churches. By too exclusive attention to internal peace, and to the mere harmony of Christian fellowship, active zeal in diffusing the gospel was neglected. The gospel ministry was not maintained in efficiency. And while attraction, not aggression, was their characteristic aim, they ceased to attract the attention, or awaken the interest of the community. Undoubtedly, however, they were called to preserve spiritual religion where they were planted, and embody the great law of Christian fellowship. They have not become extinct, or been supplanted; but have rather become merged in the body of Scottish Congregationalists; their spiritual machinery being not displaced, but only supplemented by the addition to it of an active missionary zeal; an educated and efficient ministry; and the spirit of universal brotherhood and union chastening and hallowing their separation. These brief notices sufficiently show, that scarcely at any period, certainly for no long time, have the principles for

* Historical Sketches, &c., iii.

which Scottish Congregationalists contend, been without witnesses and advocates of their truth.*

* The Baptist churches, both of Scotland and England, have been of the Congregational order, and are understood to be included in this Paper under the common name of Congregationalist.

V.

The Rise of the Scottish Congregational Churches.

For the details of the rise and early progress of these churches, the reader is referred to those parts of this volume which specially treat of these points. One or two observations are all that can legitimately fall within the limits of this Introduction.

To assert that the adoption of the Congregational polity, by the churches formed in Scotland in 1798, was in no degree owing to the existence of such views in this country anterior to their formation, or to the influence exerted by the Congregationalism of England, would be rash, and scarcely consistent with truth. Yet the facts will bear out this assertion at least,—and after the succession of independent testimonies already adduced in favour of Congregationalism, it is a point of some importance,—that the adoption of the Congregational polity in 1798 did not arise from the study of any human model, and was not the result of any efforts of the Congregationalists of England to extend their system. The most satisfactory proof of this is to be found in the fact, that whilst the most friendly relation and intercourse have been maintained betwixt the Congregational churches of England and Scotland through the whole of the half-century now under review, and there is perfect iden-

tity of principle in the two bodies, the temperament and habit of the Scottish sister are quite distinguishable from those of her senior of the South.

The story of their rise is short, but of sublime import. The vitalizing doctrines of the cross had produced in the minds of many Christians increased spirituality and zeal for the Lord's cause. Each brought his quota of individual effort to his Divine Master, saying, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Discouraged, reproached, and overborne by ecclesiastical authority, residing in the hands of a class who might naturally be suspected of being under temptation to restrain the full privileges of the unofficial or lay members of Christ's flock, they went to Scripture for direction and guidance. The contrast betwixt the divine provisions in the word, and the human prohibitions in the church, amazed and gladdened their hearts. The first glimpses of spiritual liberty ravished their inquiring and solicitous souls. They found themselves possessed, by divine right, of privileges, which, in the name of their gracious King and Lord, had been interdicted to them. They pursued their search, and certified their discovery; until at length, impatient of ignominious thralldom, they form themselves into churches of the Congregational model, as the best offering of obedience to their Divine King, and the only sufficient security of their divine rights and liberties.

We point, therefore, to these churches as independent witnesses to the scriptural character of this system, and to the evident fitness of its provisions to

satisfy the cravings, and give vent to the impulses, of regenerated men.

The employment of lay agency, and the vindication of that course, is a part of their history to which a conspicuous and honourable place is given in the narrative which the reader will find in another part of this volume. But this fact must be associated with another in order to estimate aright the position which was occupied by these churches in the work of reforming religion in our native land. That fact is, that along with their use of lay agency, they maintained the advantage and necessity of an educated and efficient ministry. Religious communities might be named that have held by the one or the other of these principles. It should not be forgotten that the Scottish Congregationalists held by both. They chose the middle way betwixt the clerical exclusiveness of the Presbyterian sects, and the laic exclusiveness of the Glasite and Scots Independent sects. In this combination we discern one of the most healthy and honourable characteristics of these churches. They attained to an idea, which no Christian body in this country has had the courage fully to carry out. May the Scottish Congregationalists never become timid in its development! That idea is: That it is of small concern where a man has got his knowledge, whether at a university, or in the dingy workshop during moments stolen from his daily toil: that it is of small import whether a man has been so many years in college, in hall, or in academy, if he has *any how* acquired the knowledge requisite for his office: that a man may be ignorant of mathematics, be but lame in

Latin, and know Moral Philosophy only through his thinkings on the ethics which he finds in Holy Scripture, and yet have Bible-learning, and spiritual qualification sufficient to constitute him an "able minister of the New Testament." Without doubt Christian churches ought to consider, and consider well, what means it may be most expedient for them to adopt, as a general rule, for the training of men for the ministry of the gospel. But when compliance with this rule becomes the condition of entrance into the ministry, it becomes bondage and a snare. For experience has proved, that ample qualifications for the Christian ministry may be possessed by another method of acquisition; and even in the absence of some of those attainments, which may hold a place in the general rule of ministerial education. Uniformity of method, and an imaginary average of attainment, have been the stumbling-block of Christian churches. The Congregationalists of Scotland demanded QUALIFICATION for the ministry of the gospel. But it was an aptness, not scholastic, or literary, but ministerial—a rule which would have admitted Andrew Fuller without college-learning, and rejected the ripest scholar, and profoundest philosopher, who was not like him "apt to teach," and "mighty in the Scriptures." Many have thought themselves at liberty to sneer at the rapidity with which the ministry was supplied for our early churches. And unthinking and shame-faced friends have been ready to offer as an apology, the pressure of the times. We offer no apology. On no part of our history have we reason to look back with a more reasonable satisfac-

tion, either as respects the work done, or the principles on which it was done. The work was to preach the gospel simply, discriminatingly, and faithfully. How it was performed let facts testify. Even the learning of these early preachers has been grievously under-rated by the languid formalists who cannot understand how an earnest mind can exceed in its progress their own measured and mechanical pace. But even if they had been less learned than they were, they were a QUALIFIED MINISTRY. And the blessing which attended, and the fruits which have followed their labours, is their best attestation, and most enduring diploma.

VI.

The Distinguishing Principles of the Scottish Congregational Churches.

ALTHOUGH the Scottish Congregational churches do not boast themselves of written creeds and authoritative standards, their principles are quite within the reach of every enquirer. Any formal statement of them will scarcely be expected in this place; and, after the historical notices which have already detained the attention of the reader, such a statement is unnecessary.

Congregationalism, as it regards the internal constitution of the church, holds: that under the presidency and rule of the pastorhood all the members of the congregation (*ecclesia*, church) are brethren; that it is equally the interest, right, and obligation of all to bear a part in conducting those spiritual affairs which come under the charge of a Christian church; and that while all acts of authority proceed from the ruler, his rule is conducted in the presence and with the concurrence of the congregation (church). The divine law, say Congregationalists, prescribes this constitution for the church: the spirituality of the church's fellowship *requires* it.

It is not our intention to vindicate, so much as to state these principles. Such in the view of Congregationalists are the chartered rights of Christ's peo-

ple. Any measure of liberty, short of this, is an infringement on His authority, and an injury to the prosperity of His church. And, of such a spiritual enfranchisement of the Christian people, Congregationalists are the *only* advocates. In support of this Christian constitution they make their appeal "to the law and to the testimony." To their doubting brethren who allege the disorder likely to arise from such unlimited freedom, they answer, that if this constitution be liable to more disorder than those which are guarded by more conditions and checks, there is this compensation, that it is capable of more spirituality and real unity. No bond surely can be so easily worn, or can bind so strongly, as the "bond of perfectness." Presbyterians themselves rejoice in a *parity* of ministerial rank. Congregationalists have this broader ground of boasting, that *their* parity is that of the brethren. It is for their Presbyterian brethren to demonstrate how the one can be good and the other must be evil! And as for pastoral rule in a Congregational church, they argue, that if it has less range and power than elsewhere, it acquires a more spiritual character, and exerts a more beneficial influence.

Congregationalism, as it regards the external relations of the Christian congregation, asserts that the particular Christian congregation (church) is complete in itself, exempt from the authority and interference of all other parties, even of other churches, with whom it sustains a relation of communion and co-operation. Independency is a term we can allow, although our fathers disclaimed it.

Because the system which it designates has outlived many of the grosser imputations which were cast upon it. To this hour, indeed, Independency is the stalking-horse of all, who determine to combine opposition to Congregationalism with comfort to themselves, by refraining from all candid enquiry. There are still found not a few who speak of Independency as if it meant isolation and even repulsion, notwithstanding the express and reiterated provisions which this system has always made for the communion and co-operation of churches; notwithstanding the notorious fact that its earliest and ablest expounders have demonstrated its pre-eminent capabilities of union; and notwithstanding the conspicuous forms of practical union and combined agency which these churches are known to support. But the matter has been long ago taken out of the region of theory and argument into that of fact and experience. And the problem has been satisfactorily solved. Given the independency of the church (congregation) as to its particular internal interests, that the union of many particular congregations for general or common objects be safe, easy, and expedient.

But supposing that this favourite allegation were true, and that these separate societies are really incapable of any organic union as churches,—that they cannot aggregate themselves into one confederacy, we do not know that any consequence very tremendous would ensue; if all the individuals composing these churches were united to one Head, and capable, as individuals, of entering into other forms of associa-

tion for promoting the work of their common Master. There might still be the most undeniable benefits derived from their independent constitution. A nation is a society or aggregation of individuals. But within its bosom there are innumerable independent and separate families, serving the great and peculiar ends of the domestic constitution; and the benefits of the domestic constitution are not doubted or denied, merely because the nation is not composed of these families formed into one grand patriarchal confederation.

Besides the scriptural authority of these principles, which is the strongest of all encouragements to maintain them zealously, there are certain features of the present time which ought to fill the Congregationalists with hope. *The claims of the Christian people* have long been loudly asserted by the seceding bodies, and by the anti-patronage section of the State-church. But recently, this has become the rallying cry of a Protesting church; and has, by this means, acquired a currency and acceptance in the community, altogether extraordinary. The boon bestowed on the Christian people, by any of the parties referred to, comes far short, it is true, of the claim asserted in their behalf. *All* that Christ gave to his people is claimed for them. But what is actually bestowed is only the right to elect their rulers. Now to us it seems more easy to prove that Christ did not impart this right, than that he imparted this, and *no more*. And the hope is not unreasonable that those who have conceded thus much to the rights of the Christian people cannot stop at the point of

merely giving them the choice of their own ministers. A reflecting Christian people cannot surely be long satisfied with such a miserly boon. The spiritual impulses which have produced this relaxation of the rigid Presbyterian platform, must lead to its farther relaxation. It will be difficult to convince a Christian man, that he is of all men most capable of judging of the capabilities and character of his spiritual teacher, but utterly incapable of judging in the smallest matter of discipline; or of giving council in affairs, with which himself and his brethren are individually the principal parties concerned. It cannot but seem mysterious and inexplicable that his spiritual functions are of essential advantage in one part of the church's affairs, viz., the appointment of the pastor, but become useless, inexpedient, and pernicious as soon as the pastor is appointed. It cannot long be concealed, that if this be all *the rights of the Christian people*, it is only the right of making over in favour of others all those active functions in the church which constitute their divine heritage.

Under such circumstances, it surely befits Congregationalists to hold fast principles which are virtually acknowledged, although in part actually evaded, by the religious parties from whom they separate.

But another distinguishing principle of the Scottish Congregational churches is this: that the constituency of the church shall be, such persons as are judged to be the genuine disciples of Jesus Christ. Now it is denied that this is a distinguishing principle of

Congregational churches. For even granting that it were true, that in the matter of communion, the Congregational churches were more spiritual than other churches, this is by no means a necessary adjunct of their system, certainly not a peculiar adjunct, since other religious bodies might adopt it. The reply to this is supplied in part by the historical argument which will be found in another part of this volume, viz., that this tenet respecting spiritual fellowship has always been characteristic of Congregationalism; and one of the main ends in the view of its promoters and defenders.

Next, we submit that it is an essential principle of Congregationalism, inasmuch as Congregationalism in its two-fold aspect, as we have already described it, grants the exercise of such rights and privileges as can be used, for their appointed purpose, only by a truly Christian congregation;—and such as cannot be intrusted to any but to those who are thus spiritually qualified to use them for the glory of Christ, and the good of His cause. Congregationalism dares not strip itself of this characteristic. This constitutes its spiritual character, its real power. It pleases many persons to speak of Congregationalism as a mere form of polity or external arrangement in the church. But it is more,—much more. It involves the very character as well as the constitution of the Church of Christ. If it were only a matter of external arrangement, our zeal in its support might justly be deemed without warrant,—for surely amongst those who are of the same character, the same spirit, and reverently submissive to the same

Divine Lawgiver, a mere matter of arrangement might speedily be put right. Nay, on this supposition, our zeal would involve a falsity, as if a mere organic constitution of a church, apart from the motives and affections by which it was wrought, could effect results of any permanent value. The divine rights which Congregationalism pleads for, it pleads for only as being in the hands of a truly Christian people.

But may we not, without presumption, or violation of charity, demur to the assertion that other bodies possess equal facilities for adopting this principle of communion? It may be congregational prejudice, but to our judgment it seems plain, that a truly Christian people—that is, a congregation, on the whole homogeneous, really spiritual,—could not be contented with anything less than the full heritage which Christ hath given to his people, and would, as the necessary effect of spiritual impulses and aspirations, demand the full use and enjoyment of Christian fellowship as Congregationalism alone supplies it.

But in bar of the special claim of the Congregationalists to this as a distinguishing principle, appeal is made to the formulas and standards of other religious bodies, in which the principle stated above is unexceptionably maintained. But we submit, that in this way the question, as between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, is not fairly met. Beyond all controversy, these standards set forth what ought to be the character of the members of the visible Church of Christ. Thus far there is agreement. But

there remains a matter of difference betwixt Congregationalists and other bodies. It is this—Ought a Christian church to require the proof or satisfactory manifestation of a truly Christian character, before admitting to communion? Is it competent to the church to determine, for the regulation of its own procedure, whether a man has given evidence of being a Christian? Is the church bound to ask for evidence of this, and nothing less? And is this the avowed and real law by which the fellowship of churches is regulated?

If Presbyterian churches will answer these questions in the affirmative, the matter is at an end. The contending parties are much nearer than they have ever conceived themselves to be. If this be no longer a subject of contention betwixt them, the other points of diversity will be speedily determined. But we are not aware of such a declaration having been made by any Presbyterian body. With our present information, we are persuaded that an answer in the affirmative to these questions Presbyterian bodies are not prepared to give. If they be, and their sentiments be thus proved to be identical with those of Congregationalists, the latter have suffered most unjust and unprincipled abuse, on account of the false and pernicious sentiments which they held upon purity of communion, which, it appears on this supposition, are not reckoned by their accusers to be false and pernicious after all. If Presbyterians and Congregationalists are at one on this point, false and injurious impressions respecting Congregational strictness of communion have been kept alive in the po-

pular mind ; impressions which, confirmed by their avowed principles and known practice, have done much to alienate the masses from the Congregational churches ; because, in shutting out from their communion those who were freely admissible into other religious bodies, they affixed a dishonouring stigma to their character. "Have we suffered so many things in vain?" Whence the charges so often reiterated, of Congregational churches pretending to judge the heart ; presuming to stand in the place of God ; encouraging vanity and false confidence on the part of their members ; and cherishing sectarian antipathies against Christians as good as themselves ? Congregational churches have not changed. Their principle and practice now, have been their principle and practice from the first. If others have changed, let them avow it. The matter is too weighty to be left undetermined. Let the Christian church be at one upon this point, and the greatest obstacle to Christian union is taken out of the way.

We make no charge against the actual communion of any other body ; as we pronounce no flattering encomium on our own. Only, if this be the principle and law of communion, it may be expected that, when acted upon, it will produce appropriate fruits. But if, for applying such a test, Congregationalists are still charged with presumption, Presbyterians can only escape from the terms of their own censure by adopting another and less scrutinizing test. If, notwithstanding this lower standard of character adopted by them, their communion is spiritual and Christian, then the effect rises higher than the cause,

and an examination, which is not designed to separate believers from unbelievers, does actually separate them, contrary to the design and expectation of those who conduct it. And finally, if they know that their communion is pure, then it seems that, in coming to this conclusion, they can distinguish genuine Christian character from its mere form, while they deny that Congregationalists can.

Of the principles now under discussion, we will only further add, that they seem calculated to act beneficially, on the pulpit, in leading the preacher to make a just discrimination betwixt those who serve the Lord and those who serve him not:—on Christian character, as developing by action and responsibility the spiritual faculties:—and on the efficiency of the Christian church, by giving freedom of action to every individual member, and to the whole a power of readily adapting their procedure to the varying demands of divine Providence.

The most recent “declaration” of principles is that adopted at the General Meeting of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in May 1833. Believing them to be substantially identical with the principles of the churches in the northern division of the island, we append, for the information of the reader, the chapter entitled,

“PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH, ORDER AND DISCIPLINE.

“I. The Congregational churches hold it to be the will of Christ that true believers should voluntarily assemble together to observe religious ordinances, to promote mutual edification and holiness, to per-

petuate and propagate the gospel in the world, and to advance the glory and worship of God, through Jesus Christ; and that each society of believers, having these objects in view in its formation, is properly a Christian church.

“II. They believe that the New Testament contains, either in the form of express statute, or in the example and practice of apostles and apostolic churches, all the articles of faith necessary to be believed, and all the principles of order and discipline requisite for constituting and governing Christian societies; and that human traditions, fathers, and councils, canons, and creeds, possess no authority over the faith and practice of Christians.

“III. They acknowledge Christ as the only Head of the Church, and the officers of each church under him, as ordained to administer his laws impartially to all; and their only appeal, in all questions touching their religious faith and practice, is to the sacred Scriptures.

“IV. They believe that the New Testament authorizes every Christian church to elect its own officers, to manage all its own affairs, and to stand independent of, and irresponsible to, all authority, saving that only of the Supreme and Divine Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

“V. They believe that the only officers placed by the apostles over individual churches, are the bishops or pastors, and the deacons; the number of these being dependent upon the numbers of the church; and that to these, as the officers of the church, is committed respectively the administration of its

spiritual and temporal concerns,—subject, however, to the approbation of the church.

“VI. They believe that no persons should be received as members of Christian churches, but such as make a credible profession of Christianity, are living according to its precepts, and attest a willingness to be subject to its discipline; and that none should be excluded from the fellowship of the church but such as deny the faith of Christ, violate his laws, or refuse to submit themselves to the discipline which the word of God enforces.

“VII. The power of admission into any Christian church, and rejection from it, they believe to be vested in the church itself, and to be exercised only through the medium of its own officers.

“VIII. They believe that Christian churches should statedly meet for the celebration of public worship, for the observance of the Lord's Supper, and for the sanctification of the first day of the week.

“IX. They believe that the power of a Christian church is purely spiritual, and should in no way be corrupted by union with temporal or civil power.

“X. They believe that it is the duty of Christian churches to hold communion with each other, to entertain an enlarged affection for each other, as members of the same body, and to co-operate for the promotion of the Christian cause; but that no church, or union of churches, has any right or power to interfere with the faith or discipline of any other church, further than to separate from such as, in faith or practice, depart from the gospel of Christ.

“XI. They believe that it is the privilege and

duty of every church to call forth such of its members as may appear to be qualified, by the Holy Spirit, to sustain the office of the ministry; and that Christian churches unitedly ought to consider the maintenance of the Christian ministry in an adequate degree of learning, as one of its especial cares; that the cause of the gospel may be both honourably sustained, and constantly promoted.

“XII. They believe that church officers, whether bishops or deacons, should be chosen by the free voice of the church, but that their dedication to the duties of their office should take place with special prayer, and by solemn designation, to which most of the churches add the imposition of hands by those already in office.

“XIII. They believe that the fellowship of every Christian church should be so liberal as to admit to communion in the Lord's Supper all whose faith and godliness are, on the whole, undoubted, though conscientiously differing in points of minor importance; and that this outward sign of fraternity in Christ should be co-extensive with the fraternity itself, though without involving any compliances which conscience would deem to be sinful.”

VII.

The Strength and Weakness of Congregationalism.

THE retrospect of 50 years awakens mingled sentiments of humiliation and hope. With grateful confidence the Scottish Congregational churches may exclaim: By the grace of God we continue unto this day: and with humiliation they may remember, that their birth-time was one of high hope and large promise; but that the benefits which might reasonably have been anticipated from such a movement, so begun, have been but partially realised.

Not that we can speak of that movement as having, in any sense, issued in failure. Speaking of it as if it were an experiment, it has been one eminently successful; especially when we add to the direct, recognised results of the movement, the influence which Congregational churches have exerted beyond the limits of their own communion. For if in any degree they have contributed to the spiritual improvement of other religious bodies, they have been accomplishing good of the most desirable kind.

After the experience of so long a time, no inherent defect has been discovered in the ecclesiastical polity which Congregationalists reverence as divine. When therefore we speak of the weakness of Congregationalism, it cannot be understood of any defect

in the provision which it makes for the liberty, prosperity, and efficiency of the church, but only of the weakness and faultiness of human agents, who either misapprehend its principles, or through perverse tempers misuse them.

This is the case, for instance, when Congregationalism is lauded as an ecclesiastical machinery of great excellence and power, but is at the same time unassociated with spiritual character in those who work it, or with the spirit of meekness, which alone can animate it with its appropriate energy. *Then* Congregationalism will prove to be weak and contemptible.

Or, when its adherents contend earnestly for their so-called rights, while they neglect the co-ordinate obligations and responsibilities which rest on every man to promote, to the utmost of his ability, the spiritual interests of the church ;—when the popular element is valued more as a check and control upon every thing that can be imagined by the most watchful jealousy to interfere with the liberty of the individual will, rather than as the motive, working energy of the Christian church, promoting the great interests of Christ's kingdom better than any other instrumentality can ;—then Congregationalism will be weak, and stand forth as an arbitrary, fitful, dogmatic, controversial, overbearing thing, instead of a great law of Christian life, regulating the faithful brotherhood by the spirit of holiness.

Or, when Congregationalism shall mainly occupy itself either with questions of internal organization ; or in seeking the edification of the brethren ; or in

defending its scriptural authority ; or in vindicating its unequalled capabilities, while the Lord's work is neglected ; and through the decay of vital religion and Christian zeal its works are few and feeble ;— then its boast of pre-eminent powers will render it only contemptible, and will fix upon the system that reproach which should attach only to its treacherous friends.

These principles, it should ever be remembered, are valuable only for their use. It is little to have a scriptural theory of a church, if we have not its scriptural efficiency and power. It will be little to the honour or stability of these churches, if they maintain purity of communion in admitting to their communion, and relax watchfulness and discipline towards those who are already admitted. The pre-eminent fitness of Congregationalism as the organism of the gospel, for its preservation and diffusion, will be best attested by the works which it performs.

The vocation of the Congregational churches is to exhibit Christianity, in its natural development, in the church and toward the world. It is not for them to compete with other religious bodies in the number of their adherents, the magnitude of their schemes, or the extent of their missionary operations. It is theirs to exhibit churches of a primitive form, a primitive character, and primitive power. Their strength is the spirituality of their character and fellowship. Let their distinctive principles appear under this commendation and they will find adoption. They lie near, as has been shown, to the original impulses and strongest yearnings of God's redeemed

children. And when, by the illumination of the blessed Spirit, men's senses are exercised to discern His will, may we not hope their triumph will be full?

The affairs of men are subject to periodical conjunctures, which "try men's work of what sort it is." Such a crisis is that to which these churches seem to have come. Through a history, brief indeed, but most chequered and troublous, they have passed. They have suffered many disappointments. They have been subjected to much deserved, and much undeserved, reproach. They have been taught many lessons. And now, with the scars of their warfare upon them, they continue unto this day.

The alternative administered by Divine Providence, in this their hour of waiting and patience, is this:—You may fail. You may relax your attachment to principles which experience as well as Scripture has proved to be divine; but your failure will only prove that you were unworthy of a cause, which others will take up when you have laid it down. Others will carry to triumph what you ignominiously left to neglect and reproach.—Or: You may "endure." You may gird up the loins of your mind, and, with spirits renewed and sanctified by divine grace, and with hands whose feebleness has been exchanged for power, you may go forward, and amid the crowning honours of your accomplished mission, may understand the will of the Lord concerning you.

Surely, the decision, in answer to such an appeal, can only be on the side of steadfast fidelity to their high vocation. These churches have already wea-

thered the most difficult part of their voyage. They have their seat amongst an intelligent and reflective people, who cling to a principle when they have once discovered its value,—a people who have an inborn and hereditary love of religious freedom. Their principles have already effected a wide dissemination. Their place among the Christian sects is one of respect and honour. Their sentiments have secured much secret favour in the minds of many who do not openly adopt them. Their principles have already infused themselves largely into other bodies—a fact at no time so conspicuous as at the present moment. On every hand the reins of clerical domination, through their example and advocacy, are being relaxed, and the breath of Christian fellowship is being sweetened. Let them be but faithful. Their motto is, TRUTH AND LIBERTY — LIBERTY IN THE TRUTH! Their work is not done, until a free, spiritual Christianity have embraced and transformed our native land.

May the present race of Scottish Congregationalists be baptized with the spirit of their fathers! *They* believed in the divinity of their cause; hence, “out of weakness they were made strong.”

THE FIRST LOVE LEFT:

A SERMON

PREACHED IN ALBANY STREET CHAPEL, EDINBURGH,

ON LORD'S DAY EVENING, OCTOBER 22D, 1848:—

ON OCCASION OF

THE JUBILEE OF THE CHURCHES OF THE
SCOTTISH CONGREGATIONAL UNION.

By RALPH WARDLAW, D.D.

THE FIRST LOVE LEFT.

REV. ii. 4. "Nevertheless, I have [somewhat] against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

ON looking at your Bibles, you will observe that the word "*somewhat*" in this verse is marked as *supplementary*. The verse might be more briefly and tersely rendered—"Nevertheless, I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love."—In the two verses immediately preceding, the Lord Jesus, to whose dictation John wrote, gives the Church of Ephesus a very high character. It is not easy, indeed, to imagine a higher:—"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted."—Here we have—personal and social activity, nay self-denying and exhausting labour, in good works; patient endurance of suffering; purity of fellowship and impartial faithfulness of discipline; soundness of doctrine, and discriminative repudiation of error; unflinching and unfainting per-

severance;—and all “for Christ’s name’s sake,”—a phrase, which can mean nothing less than from a hearty attachment to Him and to his cause.—A church receiving from Christ himself commendation such as this, might, we are apt to think, be tempted to ask—“*What lack we yet?*” It is of this same church, however, that he adds, in the terms of our text—“Nevertheless, I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love.”

It is my purpose to found on the words a series of observations, which they seem naturally to suggest;—each of which contains a salutary lesson, needful to be always borne in remembrance,—and all of which have appeared to me specially suitable to the occasion on which I have been called to address you.

I. The *first* of these lessons is—THE INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY OF LOVE—THE LOVE SPOKEN OF IN THE TEXT—TO THE CHARACTER OF EVERY BELIEVER, AND OF EVERY CHURCH.

In illustrating this lesson, LOVE might be understood in all its comprehensiveness of reference—as inclusive of love to God, to Christ, to Christians, and to mankind. They are all essential; and they are all inseparable. Wherever there is the first, all the rest will be found. And they will be found, moreover, proportionals to each other; not only existing in union, but existing in corresponding degrees,—advancing and declining, waxing and waning, gaining and losing strength together.—And still further,—they are all *practical*. They are not in being, if they are not in exercise. They are not in

the heart, if they are not in the life. The amount of their practical productiveness is at once the proof of their existence, and the measure of their intensity. "What saith the Scripture," accordingly, respecting each of them? Love to God:—"This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."—Love to CHRIST:—"If a man love me, he will keep my sayings; he that loveth me not, keepeth not my words."—Love to CHRISTIANS:—"Beloved, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth:"—"if a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed, be filled,—notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body, what doth it profit?"—Love to MANKIND:—"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, specially to them who are of the household of faith."—And the reality of the two former loves is to be tested by the practical efficiency of the two latter; the reality, that is, of love to God and love to Christ by the practical efficiency of love to fellow-Christians and fellow-men, — especially the former:—"Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth *the love of God* in him?"—"If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he *love God* whom he hath not seen?"—"Inasmuch as ye did it,—or did it not,—to the least of these my brethren, ye did it, or ye did it not, *to me*."

It may, I think, be assumed, that in our text the

love specially intended is *love to Christ*. Throughout this, and all the other six epistles, it is Christ himself that addresses the churches. It is he himself that commands, praises, censures, threatens, promises:—it is to himself that their heart's homage and their life's service are to be rendered:—it is to the obligations under which they lay to himself that his appeals are made:—it is their fidelity to himself that he approves, and the contrary that he condemns:—and it is by himself that, as his professed subjects and servants, they are to be finally accepted or disowned.—In the subsequent illustration of the text, I shall proceed on the assumption, that such is the love meant in it,—love to the divine Saviour himself. How strongly, both by himself and by his inspired servants, is the necessity of this love affirmed! By himself:—“He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.” And to his fallen, but penitent and restored apostle, his one question is—as if it contained the essential element of both the personal and the official character—“Simon, son of Jonas, *lovest thou me?*”—By his inspired servants:—“Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity!”—“If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maranatha!” Without this love, and its kindred accompaniments, there is no Christianity. Faith is “dead, being alone.” If it does not “work by love,” it has no existence. It is but the word without the thing; the letter without the spirit; profession

without principle; a "name to live," without the life; a "form of godliness, without the power;" a mere "sounding brass, and tinkling cymbal."

Think of this, all who now hear me. Let the testing question with each one of you—testing, I mean, as to your very title to the Christian name—be, *Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?*—do you love him for what he is, and do you love him for what he *hath done*? On both grounds, his claims upon your love are unrivalled in their amount. Where is his like in character? He stands alone in the universe. Where is one to be found besides himself, in whom are combined the perfect moral loveliness of the godhead and the corresponding loveliness of sinless humanity? And where is his like in self-sacrificing grace for your well-being? Where is the rival benefactor, who would, or who could, have done for you what has been done by Him? To each one of *you*, then, he puts the question—"Lovest thou me?" Can you,—with how deep soever and abasing a sense of sad deficiency, yet can you with humbly conscious sincerity,—with a "spirit in which there is no guile," return Peter's answer—"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?" Then it is well. The heart in which Christ dwells cannot fail to be "right with God." To love Christ is to love the Father. And the Father, who infinitely loves the resident inmate, will bless and gladden with a participation in that love the heart that has opened to him, and welcomed him in. And "in his favour is life."

II. My *second* lesson is—that THE “FIRST LOVE” TO THE SAVIOUR WAS IN THE CASE OF THE EPHESIAN BELIEVERS, AND USUALLY AND NATURALLY IS, ARDENT AND DEVOTED.

I am aware that, in this department of experience, there are no inconsiderable diversities. It is evidently of such a love as is truly enlightened and principled that the Saviour, when he speaks of the “first love,” is to be understood as approving. Now such a love, it is further manifest, must be evolved in the heart according to the degree in which the attributes of character and the acts and sacrifices of kindness, by which it is attracted and enkindled, are unfolded to the mind. But, although not in scripture, yet in common usage, “the first love” is a designation sometimes applied to that outburst of exuberant and affectionate transport, which blazes up in the heart, when a man is first brought to see and to feel his guilt, and wretchedness, and danger, and, at the same time, to have the discovery made to him by the Holy Spirit’s teaching, of the fulness and freeness of Gospel grace, as reigning, to the chief of sinners, through the merits of the righteousness and blood of a divine Redeemer.—It should be recollected, that in these early times, the Gospel, wherever it came, was new; and that, as a consequence, the larger proportion of conversions were, comparatively, sudden. The glad tidings came upon the hearers at once, accompanied with its divine credentials. They had heard nothing like it before. The power of God, outwardly and inwardly, attended it. It is in such cases that the particular

state of feeling, to which I have just referred, is most frequently to be found. Not that we are, by any means, without examples of it amongst ourselves. But in a country like ours, where acquaintance with the elements of Bible truth is so extensively diffused,—and especially among those who are “brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,” and into whose minds the knowledge of those elements has been gradually and almost imperceptibly instilled, it is not naturally to be expected that the same class of appearances should so often present themselves. And yet in these latter cases, there may be, not only the same reality, but the same and even a greater measure of purity and strength, in the principle of which I am now treating—“the first love.” I mention this the rather, because in some instances,—instances in which there has been any thing but doubtfulness about the reality of the divine operation in the heart, and the introduction into it of the love of Christ as its new and mighty principle of spiritual life and action,—not a little despondency and perplexing doubt has been experienced on account of the absence, or the inferior degree, of that violent emotion, that excited and tumultuous effervescence of feeling, of which the parties have read or heard, as having accompanied the conversions of some others. The perplexity and depression have been groundless. The difference is at once accounted for from diversity of previous circumstances, character, and state of mind,—associated many a time too with variety of constitutional temperament, both corporeal and mental, both phy-

sical and moral.—In the cases of such “first love” as I have been adverting to, indeed, there is frequently no small amount of drawback. There is more of heat than of light. The flashing and bickering blaze is blended with no little smoke. There is more of emotion than of enlightened and clearly discerned principle. There are mighty ebullitions of feeling, amidst conceptions of Christian doctrine and Christian duty, that are as yet but crude, confused, and defective. There is the sudden warmth of a noisy and brilliant flame, rather than the steady, concentrated, settled heat of the glowing furnace.

I need not say, that it is of the latter of these two, not the former, that our Saviour here speaks. It is an enlightened love. It is the affection of the heart, elicited and sustained by divinely imparted knowledge in the mind:—“Did not our heart burn within us, when he talked with us by the way, and when he opened to us the Scriptures?” It is the light and the heat, combined in the rays of divine truth, entering the soul together and in due proportions, corresponding in their respective degrees of intensity.—It is not the temporary excitement of the stony-ground hearer, who “receives the word with joy” but who “has no root in himself,”—no clear and consistent apprehensions, and therefore no intelligent and settled convictions, of the truth,—and who gives way before the first onset of unanticipated trial:—it is the fixed and principled attachment of him who, “having heard the word, and understood it, keeps it in an honest and good

heart" (the product of its influence), "and brings forth fruit with patience."*

I have said that this "first love" to the Saviour is usually ardent and devoted. How can it, when genuine, be otherwise? When the mind and heart are first opened, by the divine Spirit, to the discernment of the lovely excellencies of that Saviour's character, and of the wonders of his work of grace;—when the awakened, convicted, self-condemned, trembling sinner has it given to him to see the divinely perfect suitableness of that Saviour and his salvation to all the exigencies of his wretched case, as well as to feel his utter unworthiness of such grace, and of an interposition so marvellous in his behalf;—how can either the first joy fail to be lively, or the first love to be ardent?—Thus it had been with the believers at Ephesus. The history shows it. It was this "first love" that prompted the earnest entreaty for the Apostle Paul's longer stay with them on his first visit;—that he might tell them more about Christ: and that, in their grateful kindness to the servant, they might testify their love to his and their Saviour and Lord.—It was under the impulse of this "first love," that the converted magicians burned their books of sorcery, and parted with their worldly all.—It was this love that animated the elders of the Church, when they left their homes, and went to meet the Apostle at Miletus;

* Compare the parallel passages in Matth. xiii. 23, Mark iv. 20, and Luke viii. 15:—and examine the Greek of the last of the three.

and that, when parting from him there, after receiving his touchingly affectionate and faithful counsels, threw them on their knees along with him, and, amid the eager fondness of a last embrace, drowned their eyes in sorrow.—And Paul's subsequent epistle to the Church shows it. The entire style of that letter, so full of heart, so impregnated with the spirit of evangelical love, gives us the same impression of them which the history had given. His very prayers for them, recorded there, are manifestly the prayers of one who knew that those for whom he prayed were converts of kindred spirit with himself, who would put their own hearts into his petitions. He speaks of them, moreover, as, "when they believed," having been "sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of the heavenly inheritance;"—of his having "heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus, and their love to all the saints" for his sake;—and, on that account, of his "not ceasing to give thanks for them." Thus, then, it was with them at the first; and thus it continued with them for some time after. Hints of apprehensive anticipation—about "grievous wolves entering in among them, not sparing the flock," and about "men arising even among themselves, speaking perverse things, and drawing away disciples after them"—had been thrown out in the Apostle's parting address at Miletus. These, dictated as they were by the Spirit of God, began, by and by, to be verified:—so that thirty years after, when this epistle was addressed to them by Jesus himself through "the disciple whom he loved," there had taken place

such a measure of spiritual declension, as to warrant the complaint in our text—"I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love."

My next two lessons must be founded on somewhat different views of the import of the text:—the *one*, on the sense ordinarily attached to it,—because there is truth in that sense, nor am I indeed ready to affirm, with any decidedness, that it is not the right one;—the *other*, on the view which I am myself disposed to take of it, because to me there appears to be still more of truth in it, and (for reasons I shall assign) a greater likelihood at least of its being the right one.

III. I observe, then, *thirdly*:—THERE MAY BE NOT A LITTLE DECLENSION IN LOVE,—IN THE PURE AND FERVENT EXERCISE OF THE INWARD PRINCIPLE,—WHILE YET THERE REMAINS NOT A LITTLE OF THE OUTWARD ZEALOUS ACTION WHICH IT HAS PRODUCED.

This, as I have just hinted, is the species of declension generally understood as being meant in our text. The character given of the church and its officers in the preceding verses is conceived to remain as described,—to be, that is, not merely its past, but its present character:—whilst, in the midst of all that is thus commended, there was, in the sight of that eye which "searcheth the reins and the hearts," a sad falling-off in the *principle* of action,—in the state of the inward feeling and motive. As a specimen of the ordinary view, I give the following remarks of a popular and judicious commentator on the passage—*Mr. Scott*:—"There is," says he, "some difficulty in conceiving how the

persevering diligence and patience of this church could consist with that abatement in love with which it is charged. But observation and experience combine to prove, that in many instances, while the affections are lively and fervent, men engage zealously in services, and form habits of exertion, self-denial, patience, and courageous disregard to opposition and reproach; in which, as to the outward conduct at least, they persevere, from various motives, and often conscientiously; though it is lamentably true, and they know it, that their hearts are not so thoroughly engaged in what they do, as they once were. Many are well aware that this is their case. They have zeal enough to retain them in their former course of active service; which is become habitual, and, in some circles, creditable. But had they not been more 'fervent in spirit serving the Lord' in former days, these habits could never have been formed, and these services had never been engaged in. Perhaps most Christians are too apt to take encouragement from such diligence, and to silence the remonstrances of their consciences by it. But it is plain that our Saviour and Judge considers this as a very criminal state of heart and conduct."

Now I am very far from questioning either the truth or the practical importance of such comments. All Christians should bear them in mind, and be induced by them to "keep their hearts with all diligence." The process described is more than an imaginary, or even than a barely possible one. Works may, without doubt, continue to be done ex-

ternally, and with not a little of bustling zeal and apparent, nay even real, interest and ardour,—while the inward principle, by which the doing of them was originally prompted and maintained, may have undergone material changes. It may have become alloyed in purity, as well as abated in strength. To the eye of man, the works done may still be “the first works,”—no alteration discernible;—while to the eye of Him who “seeth not as man seeth,”—who, while “man is looking on the outward appearance, looketh on the heart,” they have ceased to be such, in that which to Him is the most important and indispensable of all their characteristics,—*their principle*. They are no longer the product of the “*first love* ;”—of love in part, it may be, still,—but not of the “*first love*.” Other motives, other principles, less sterling in their elements, have come to mingle themselves with it. God discerns them, though men do not,—and though even the subject of them, from failure in self-scrutiny, may hardly be conscious of their operation. The domestic and sanctuary duties of religion may be kept up with exemplary punctuality; and no small amount of zeal may continue to be discovered for scriptural doctrine, worship, and discipline,—as well as of activity and liberality for the support of missionary and other benevolent efforts; while the “simplicity and godly sincerity” of the “*first love*” have been contaminated, and its early ardour has been cooled:—those other principles, of a degenerate and spurious character, having come in the room of the failing power, and kept up the same external

appearances; similar outward results being often the product of very different inward principles. Even the force of "*habit*"—to which Mr. Scott alludes, may do much towards this state of things:—*a regard to character and consistency* may do still more:—the "*love of the praise of men*" too, in the circle in which, perhaps long, the person has moved, may add its influence in the same direction:—and, worse in God's sight than them all,—the anti-evangelical principle of *self-righteousness* may powerfully insinuate itself into the deceitful heart,—eating out, to the full extent in which it is allowed to operate, the pure and child-like simple-heartedness of the "*first love*,"—the lowly, grateful, self-distrusting, and self-devoting affection which the Saviour's grace and the Saviour's loveliness originally inspired.—The works which sprung from that source, and which—when regarded as the expressions of gratitude for that "*love of Christ*" which, in "*height and depth, in breadth and length, passeth knowledge*," were looked upon as unworthy of being so much as mentioned, and as causes for shame rather than for boasting—may come to be contemplated with a measure of self-complacent confidence:—and thus, taking the place, in part, of that entire, self-renouncing confidence in Christ, which was the inseparable attendant of the "*first love*,"—may so far put *self* in the Saviour's room; so that He no longer has, what he had before, and what he ever demands, and cannot be satisfied without,—*an undivided heart*.

I am far, I repeat, very far, from denying the

possibility of all this. I more than admit it. I would myself be put on my guard by it, and put my brethren in Christ on theirs. Let us not forget God's account of our hearts:—they are “deceitful above all things.” Their tendencies and movements require to be watched with a jealous and sleepless vigilance. Our self-examination needs ever to be *twofold*; the scrutiny, not of the life alone, but of the life and heart together,—not of the conduct alone, but of its principle. Never let it slip out of mind, that to please God, the one must be right as well as the other:—and, conscious to ourselves how exceedingly apt motives of a mingled and at best dubious character ever are of intruding themselves, and, if not of entirely supplanting, of at least materially marring and deteriorating, those of a higher and better order,—let us see to it that we be ever carefully scrutinizing the moving powers by which we are secretly influenced, and imploring the aids of the Spirit of God to keep our first love pure and entire, unblended with the love of self and of the world; to keep all our spiritual affections sincere and fervent; our consciences sensitively tender, and shrinking from every thing that might expose those affections to the risk of being either tainted in their purity or cooled in their warmth; our “eye single;” our service rendered to one Master; the throne of our hearts reserved for Christ, and for Christ alone. Let “his love ever constrain us,—thus judging, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that we who live should no longer live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again.”

IV. But I must now observe, *fourthly* :—THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE, WE INVARIABLY FIND PRACTICE THE TEST OF LOVE, WHETHER IN INDIVIDUALS OR IN CHURCHES,—THE CONDUCT EVER APPEALED TO, AS THE ONLY UNEQUIVOCAL AND SATISFACTORY PROOF OF ITS REALITY.

It is on the ground of this fact that my doubts rest, as to the correctness of the common interpretation. — I am inclined, then, to think, that the “leaving of the first love” has reference *both to the principle itself and to the practice which was its product and exponent*; that the previous verses describe not so much at least *present* character as *past*,—not what, to the full extent, the Ephesian Church *now was*, but what it *had been*;—the Saviour taking in its entire career, and bestowing upon it all due commendation :—and that the text is an affirmation of their having declined both in the principle and in the character,—of the love and its practical productiveness having proportionally failed together. I see objections, and I feel their strength :*—yet the

* The chief of these objections arises from the use of the *present tense*, where, had present character not been intended, the *past* might have been expected :—“how thou *canst not bear* (*οὐ δύνη βάρεσθαι*) them who are evil ;”—“and *hast patience*” (*ὀρεσθῆναι ἡχίαι*). All the other parts of the description may be understood of the past,—that is, as inclusive of the whole period of the church’s history. If the words quoted *cannot* also be so understood, on the principle of gathering the items of character from that whole period, and concentrating them, as constituting the ground of present commendation,—and I do not confidently affirm that they can,—the reader must adopt the ordinary view, as given under the preceding particular. All that I can wish is, that the considerations about to be stated be well weighed, with the

considerations in favour of this view of the passage seem to me more than sufficient to outweigh them. They are such as these :—

1. It is most natural and reasonable, to conceive of principle and practice—of love and the labour of love—of zeal and the doings of zeal—declining together. This is what, in every department, we look for. In mechanics,—when a power becomes slackened and enfeebled, we expect this to be apparent in its diminished efficiency.—In the world of physical life, whether animal or vegetable,—we do not look for a distempered or paralyzed arm doing the work of a sound one ; or for a tree, whose roots are decaying, and whose nutritive juices are scanty, bearing the crops of one that is healthy and vigorous. And so in morals :—we expect that when, from whatever cause, a principle of action has declined in vital and influential energy, the decrease of its power should be accompanied and indicated by a corre-

question in mind whether they are, or are not, sufficient to counterbalance this grammatical objection. There is one comfort, that, in either conclusion, the practical lessons will be found in full harmony with the principles and precepts of the Bible at large ; that, whichever of the views be adopted, there is no error as to either doctrine or duty.—It may even be thought by some that the first of the two views is preferable, on account of its furnishing, among the different characters of the seven churches, its own distinct variety. Neither would I be insensible to the force of this consideration. The greater the diversity of recorded cases, the more complete are the materials for self-examination.—While, therefore, I incline to prefer the latter of the two interpretations, for the reasons subsequently assigned, I am far from feeling any solicitude about the reader's decision.

sponding decrease in the actual results of its exercise. — While, therefore, we admit that the case supposed under the former particular is far from impossible, we cannot but consider that which we are now supposing as by much the more natural and likely.

2. If this be not the true interpretation, — how difficult a problem does it become, — how nearly beyond the range of the possible, — either to attain for ourselves, or to possess as to others, any sufficient and satisfactory evidence of genuine love! — I have said, that throughout the Word of God, the appeal is ever to conduct as the test of principle, — to the actions of the life, as the proofs of love in the heart. Now only look again, for one moment, at the character ascribed to this church in the preceding verses. If a church is found actively working, nay labouring to the very exhaustion of its powers of effort; — enduring hardships and trials of faith with unsubdued patience; — tolerating nought that is evil, but maintaining its social purity by strictness of admission and faithful impartiality of discipline; — zealously adhering to apostolic doctrine, and, with a jealous dread of error, carefully testing the claims of all pretenders to inspiration, — “trying the spirits whether they be of God;” — themselves thus “un-corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ,” and “holding fast the faithful word as they had been taught;” — and, up to that hour, steadily persisting in this nobly consistent course, in the face of harassing and heart-sinking opposition: — if, I say, a church is found doing all this, — justifying such a

character,—a character drawn by the Lord himself, and therefore, we are sure, in no one jot or tittle either untrue or exaggerated;—and yet, after all, the first love may have been left,—the great principle of obedience to the Divine Head may have so declined as to call for pointed censure, and for admonition to repent, and, recovering herself from her fallen state, to do her first works,—and that at the risk or the certainty of extinction if she did not:—then, how are we ever satisfactorily to test and ascertain the reality of either our own love, or that of others?

3. It does appear to me, that in the admonition to repentance addressed to this church, the injunction to "*do the first works*" is by far most naturally interpreted as implying that there had been a falling off in the works themselves as well as in their principle;—and not as meaning that the "*first works*" were still done, but were not now, to the degree in which they formerly had been, if indeed at all, animated by the "*first love*,"—as if there were no declension, and no deficiency, in the amount of work done, but only in the quality of the actuating motive. I think it more reasonable to conceive of their works as having fallen off with their love; and that it is both as to the declining principle and its declining productiveness, that they are admonished, on pain of judicial visitation and abandonment, to repentance and reformation.

4. I am confirmed in this conviction by the fact, that the one particular exception from the general inculcation of the church,—the one special circum-

stance still reserved in her favour,—*is itself of this practical description*:—verse 6. “But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans,—which I also hate.” Let it be observed, that one of the features of the previously delineated character is—“*thou canst not bear them that are evil.*” This, you perceive, is quite general—unqualified. Now, if this was still the case with them, why this exceptive specification? Does not the language of the sixth verse naturally imply, that their character was not now, in this respect, what it once was,—but still, that there was this exception? “With all thy defects” (as if he had said) “this thou still hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans,—which I also hate?”—Even the very terms of admonition too—“*Remember, therefore, whence thou art fallen*”—seem to me much more emphatically appropriate, when considered as referring to their having fallen from the high character in general which they had sustained,—the character for principle embodied in practice,—for love manifested in active and suffering service;—rather than merely to an inward falling-off in the sterling purity of the principle by which, in the earlier stage of their profession, they had been animated,—their character in other respects continuing the same, and being made the subject of present and high commendation.

Let me, then, “brethren beloved in the Lord,” press it upon you, under this particular, to bear in mind, that conduct is the test—the only unequivocal test—of principle;—action, of love;—zealous and abounding action, of fervent love. In questioning

you, individually, as to your love to Christ, I might ask you, simply and directly, *How do you feel?* But that question, put by itself, would be perilous. There is another, which must ever accompany it—a safer and surer one—*How do you act?* Frames and feelings, although, when scripturally understood and guarded, they are by no means to be slighted, but form a precious part of Christian experience; yet are they not to be implicitly trusted to, as tests of principle. They are, in many ways, delusive. Words too are cheap, and easily uttered. From a certain description of professors, you may at times hear, in tones of the most profound humility, yet with but ill-concealed self-complacency, flaming accounts of their having (as their phrase is) “been on the mount,” and of their wonderful experiences there;—when the questions—what are you *doing* for Christ?—what are you *giving* for Christ?—if answered truly, would leave you but little at a loss what to think of such professions,—what estimate to form of their worth. “Ye are my friends,” said Jesus, “if ye do whatsoever I command you.” Obedience is the great proof of love. Active zeal for Christ, open-hearted and open-handed liberality for Christ,—attachment to his institutions, and personal and united exertion for the promotion of his cause, and the extension and elevation of his glory,—these must be the ways in which, individually and collectively, you must show your love. If you are, really and at heart, *loving* Christians (and who is a Christian at all that is not a loving one?) you will be *working* and *giving* Christians. If you are loving

churches, you will be working and giving churches. Your works and your gifts will be proportionate to your love,—the manifestations of its reality, and the measure of its amount. And, at the same time, you will, personally and unitedly, maintain the doctrine of Christ in its simplicity and integrity,—his ordinances in their holy but unsuperstitious sacredness; the communion of his church in its scriptural purity; his kingdom, in its glorious independence, spirituality, and freedom.—But I must hasten to my last observation.

V. LOVE TO CHRIST OUGHT TO BE, IN INDIVIDUALS AND IN CHURCHES, NOT A DECLINING BUT A GROWING PRINCIPLE.—The “first love” should be the last love; only with the difference of a constantly progressive accumulation of energy, during the entire course of Christian experience. “The last” should be “more than the first.” The case is a widely different one from that of any love we can bear to a fellow-creature. When in an earthly friend we discover those excellencies which become the basis of an admiring and fond attachment,—that friend may indeed turn out one whose engaging qualities, the longer and the closer our intimacy, are ever presenting themselves in increasingly attractive and interesting lights, and in whom, to our partial fancy at least, new ones are ever opening to view. But where, among human friends, is that extraordinary one to be found, in whom such intimacy detects no failings, no defects, no flaws, no drawbacks?—In the case of the Saviour, on the contrary, the character is one in which all is the absolute perfection of divine

and human excellence,—unblemished loveliness,—every attribute of the divine infinite,—of the human, sinless. There is no defect, no flaw, no drawback there.—And, as to what he has done for us, and the amount of obligation under which he has laid us, we must be able to comprehend divinity and eternity, before we can form a just estimate of either. Before we can calculate the amount of his condescension and grace, when, “though he was rich,”—divinely rich—“for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich”—we must comprehend *divinity*,—so as to measure the distance between what he was and what he became,—between the throne of the universe and the manger of Bethlehem:—and before we can duly appreciate the value of those riches which, in possession and in hope, he has thus made ours, we must comprehend *eternity*, with all the difference too between that eternity in hell, and that eternity in heaven!—Here, then,—whether our “first love” be regarded as the love of gratitude for blessings bestowed, or the love of complacency in character manifested,—we see room for everlasting increase. The excellencies of the character, and the glories of the work, being alike inexhaustible, every fresh contemplation of them enhances those excellencies and that glory to our minds, fills us with a growing admiration, and imparts additional intensity to both our delight and our thankfulness. And this will be the case *for ever*. The increase will be eternally progressive. We say of our love, that in heaven it will be *perfected*. And in a certain sense it is true. There

will be no alloy in our love, no feeling out of harmony with it;—and our hearts will be as full of it as they can hold. But if by *perfect* we mean *incapable of increase*, it is not true. It will be ever growing. This, through eternity, will be the case with our conceptions of the person, and character, and work of the Son of God. What mind, even in heaven, will ever be able to take in a full comprehension of that which, from its nature, is infinite?—and what heart there will ever be able to love him up to the full extent of his desert to be loved,—that desert too being infinite? The angelic knowledge of God was, from the beginning, perfect. There was no error in it; and there was no deficiency, from any one of its perfections being left out. They knew it in all its harmonious completeness. But still it was knowledge that admitted of indefinite increase and amplification. It grew with their growing observation and experience of the creative and administrative wisdom and power and goodness of the Maker and Governor of the universe. When our world was framed and furnished, these “morning stars sang together,—these sons of God shouted for joy.” It gave them a new view of God. It amplified their conceptions of him, and elevated their sentiments and emotions of adoring homage. And incomparably more was this the case, as the mysteries of redemption were unfolded. By that most glorious of God’s plans and doings, their knowledge of Him was still more enlarged and elevated. “Unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places was made known, by the church, the manifold wisdom

of God." It was a new *study* for them. "These things the angels desired to look into."

"The first archangel never saw
So much of God before."

—In the same way, our knowledge of Christ, and our love to Christ, will in heaven be perfected; while yet the knowledge will be ever-growing; and ever-growing knowledge will be the spring of ever-growing love. Every mind there will be filled with the precious knowledge, and every heart with its blessed and blessing influence; while every mind and every heart will be for ever expanding with fresh accessions of both. There will not be a dark mind, nor a cold heart, in all heaven. Every beam of light that settles upon the mind from the divine throne, will impart a fresh glow of holy extasy to the heart's love.—The "first love" of heaven will transcendently surpass, in purity and intensity alike, both the first and the last love of earth. While here, our song must ever be one in which self-complaining blends with delighted anticipation:—

"Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought;
But when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought!"

—But even on earth, it is far from being, with any of God's people, as it ought to be, when the first love is the strongest. It cannot surely be, that they who love Christ in sincerity can *love him less as they know him more!* There may not be the same peculiar liveliness and rapturous buoyancy of emo-

tion, as when the discoveries were new to the mind, and the affections new to the heart. But although, when the novelty has passed away, the love settles down more into a principle, it does not, on that account, lose aught of its intensity. Its settledness is not its abatement. It does not become cold, because it ceases to blaze; any more than the furnace becomes cold, when the flame subsides, and the white heat remains. *That* is the heat that fuses the ore.—The “love of espousals” with a “wife of youth” may have more in it of thrilling pulse-quickenings excitement and mental tumult than the long-tried affection of the conjugal union. But, where the affection is of the right sort, it gains in intensity what it loses in excitement; and becomes more and more prompt to anticipate the wishes, and to sacrifice self in every form to promote the happiness, of its object. Thus should it be with our love to Christ. As a settled principle—a heart-seated affection—an inward, glowing, quickening, moving impulse—it “grows with the growth, and strengthens with the strength” of the life of God in the soul. And then—this growth of it in the soul of each member of a church constitutes the growth of the aggregate of love in the church as a body.—O my brethren, cherish this love. Never let it decline,—in your own souls, or in your fraternal union. Cherish it—by the frequent contemplation of its object.—Cherish it—by putting it into constant active exercise: for every principle is strengthened by such exercise; and every affection languishes without it.—Cherish it—by prayer—personal and social—for the in-

fluences of that Spirit, whose special province it is to "glorify Christ," and who fulfils this his appropriate function by revealing more and more clearly and fully to the soul the "altogether lovely," and by teaching and disposing his people to trust in him, to love him, to imitate him, to serve him, and zealously to seek the advancement of the glory of his name.—And let the churches cherish it. As it is the principle of Christian action, it is the bond of Christian union. Let it be an unrelaxing—nay, an ever-tightening bond; encircling the social body, and drawing all its members more and more closely and warmly together in the "communion of saints." And, as it is the spring of personal, let it be the spring too of social activity. Let such activity be zealously maintained, both by each church, and by the churches in union. "Provoke one another to love," as the most effectual way of provoking "to good works." Plan, and act, and pray together for the interests of Christ's cause. Let faith produce "the work of faith;" love, the "labour of love." Beware of every temptation to declension. Watch against, and promptly and steadily resist, in yourselves and others, every incipient symptom of it. "Be ye stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

The inquiry, brethren, is a solemn one, in regard to the churches of the Congregational Union of Scotland generally—Has there been—is there now—any such declension—any such leaving of the first love?

And the question is not less delicate than it is solemn. No uniform answer can be given to it. There may be decline in one quarter, while there is life and progress in another. Even in the same church, there may be a falling-off in one department of duty, while in another there is growth.—The complaint, however, is general,—it meets us both South and North,—of a tendency to declension in the vitality of spiritual heart-religion,—in its inward, living, divine energy. The very existence of the complaint may fairly be held as proof sufficient of the fact. Well am I aware, indeed, that there are some spirits whose tendencies to despondency are morbid,—which are ever prone to detect and magnify the evil, and to overlook the good,—which are never in their element but amongst sighs. But it is not only from the lips of such that the complaint is to be heard: and therefore it may be concluded that there is more or less of truth in it. And if so, —to the extent in which it exists, it is a *sad* truth. Let our inquiries, then, through all our churches, be—Is it thus with us?—Whence has it arisen?—How is it to be remedied?—It is not at all my purpose at present to attempt an answer to such questions. I only press them on the serious and prayerful consideration of pastors and brethren in all the churches; and press them, with the earnest entreaty that they be not dismissed when answered, but that the answers lead to practical results. Without this, convictions, and regrets, and even resolutions, will be alike vain. Sighs over the past and the present will not amend the future. Let every church exa-

mine its own condition. If in any quarter "the first love" *has* been "left," let the consciousness of the failure awaken penitence; and let penitence stir to reformation. Let the first love draw quickening breath again. "The Spirit of the Lord is not straitened." If anywhere there is to be seen a "valley of dry bones," let the prayer go forth fervently from every heart and from every lip,—“Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain that they may live!”—Let pastors and churches alike bestir themselves. Their influence on each other is necessarily reciprocal. An earnest ministry will contribute effectually to make an earnest church; and an earnest church will keep alive and warm the spirit of an earnest ministry. If the fire of love is to be maintained in the churches, there must be burning hearts in the pulpits. If there is coldness and languor there, there will be the same in the pews. That a well educated ministry is indispensable—has ever been, and ever must continue, a settled axiom amongst us. But it must be an axiom no less decided and settled,—that in a pastor no amount of erudition can supply the place of earnest love. The office of the understanding is to animate and enflame the heart, not to be its substitute. Intellect is to inspire, not to supplant, feeling. No refinement, no elegance, can ever be an adequate succedaneum for "the simplicity that is in Christ." No drapery of human workmanship, how tasteful or how gorgeous soever, must hide the cross,—no, not from the eye of the very simplest hearer. The vail that forbade free entrance to the mercy-seat was rent in

twain when the Saviour died. Let no other vail take its place. Let the cross be ever conspicuous; the way to the mercy-seat ever patent. It is "Christ crucified" that is still, as it ever has been, "the power of God unto salvation." It is only by the exhibition of the Saviour's love to sinners, that the hearts of sinners can be won to the Saviour. The *Spirit of Christ* will set his seal to no preaching but the *preaching of Christ*. To nothing else will he give saving efficacy.—And perhaps, speaking generally, one of the chief perils of our day is the encroaching prevalence, in the treatment of Bible themes, instead of Bible illustration, of a would-be-philosophical intellectualism;—the overlaying of the simple gospel with a load of erudite criticism and speculation;—the carrying into the department of religious truth of the spirit and manner of scientific discussion,—relying on our own wisdom, instead of "becoming fools that we may be wise,"—and, instead of taking truth as we find it in the pages of revelation, putting forth our ingenuity to extract it from other sources;—the putting of something called "the pure reason" in the room of revelation, or the interpreting of revelation by the transcendentalism of the "pure reason;"—which Paul would have designated "science falsely so called," while with grief of heart he would have added—"which some professing, have erred concerning the faith." God in mercy keep from our schools of theology and from our pulpits the infection of this Christ-dethroning and self-exalting Germanism!—by which the vitality of humble evangelical piety is eaten out, and the reason of fallen

and erring man exalted above the wisdom of God ! —Let “the love of Christ constrain” our preachers and pastors to give Christ his due place in their ministry, as the central sun of the whole system of divine truths ; and, in holding forth Christ, in his divinity, righteousness, atonement, and grace, let them put their whole souls into their work,—making it the grand aim of that work, to honour Christ, and save men :—“not preaching themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and themselves the servants” of the churches and of the world “for Jesus’ sake.” “To them to live, let it be Christ.” Let every one of them “so strive to preach the gospel,” that he may be able, with a clear conscience, to make his appeal to his hearers—“I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men ; for I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God !”

And let the people, on their part, remember, how very little their pastors, especially in some localities, can effect, without their co-operation. Let the churches be in earnest, as well as the ministry. The fire in the pastor’s heart must quickly sink to ashes, if it is not breathed upon, and kept alive, by a concurring and spirited people. Pastors may propose and press plans of usefulness ; but it is by the churches that they must be carried into practical effect. If, when pastors *do* propose and press them, the brethren manifest nothing but indifference and lassitude, starting objections, seeing “lions in the way,” and affecting to sigh over their impracticability ;—if they will neither put their own hands

to the work nor supply the means of having it done;—what can the pastor do,—and what spirit can he retain?—If good is to be effectually done, pastors and people must be “of one heart and of one soul.” They must think, and feel, and act, and pray, in unison. They must “strengthen each other’s hands, and encourage each other’s hearts.” They must work together; and secure the success of the work by united and fervent supplication. O FOR MORE PRAYER! There cannot be a surer indication of declension in the “first love,” than declension in the spirit of prayer. A church is in a failing and backsliding state, when any number of its members are satisfied with flimsy excuses for absenting themselves from the meetings of the brethren for prayer. To hear it said—“*‘Tis only a prayer-meeting*”—is a sad symptom of sinking piety, in the individual and in the church. What else can thrive, if prayer be held thus lightly? Where there is no prayer, there is no blessing from God,—and what can prosper? True love can never fail to breathe itself in prayer:—and the *prayer* of love brings the blessing on the *labour* of love.

The period, of which we are this day celebrating the Jubilee Memorial, was, without question, in Scotland, a period of extraordinary interest. There was a “first love;” and it was fervent and operative. Sacrifices were made, and efforts were put forth, such as were, then at least, novel and striking. They indicated no ordinary amount of gratitude to Christ, and compassionate solicitude for perishing souls.—The scene was new. Old usages, which had

no sanction save that of custom, were disregarded. People were startled and stirred to inquiry by novelties, which never should have been novelties. "Many ran to and fro, and knowledge was increased." A vast deal is now common, which then was strange; and much is now done, and is, in a manner, looked upon as the every-day work of Christians, which, at that time, would have been equally the cause of wonder. This is well. In estimating the character of the former and the later period, we are very apt to overlook it. It is hazardous to "say of the former days—they were better than these." Solomon said in his day, and we may say the same in ours, "Thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this." In many respects there has been a wonderful advance. Let any sober-minded Christian take the pains to bring into comparison the state of the religious community of Great Britain half a century ago, and its state now. Let him look at our Bible, Missionary, Sabbath-school, Day-school, Tract, and various other benevolent institutions for specially Christian objects, and contrast all this with the almost total destitution of everything of the kind in the previous era; and he will not think I use too strong a word, when I call the change *prodigious*. And if love, as a Christian principle, is to be estimated by what is *done*, it would not be doing justice to our own day to forget that all this is new, and that it is the product of that principle. One of the evidences of the declension of the principle, would be a falling-off in the support and efficiency of such institutions. And it would be wrong to

shut our eyes to the danger, from various causes, of such declension. Our two principal sources of peril (into the illustration of which it is impossible now to enter) seem to me to be—the *spirit of a spurious speculative philosophy in the pulpit,** and *the spirit of worldly conformity in the Christian community.*—Let us, in our churches, be on our guard against both. Let pastors bear in mind the apostolic admonition — “Preach **THE WORD,**” — and let Christians in general, the members of our churches, not forget the other admonition — “Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed, by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” — Even amongst ourselves,—in our own churches,—while alas! there is sadly too much of a “spirit of slumber,”—yet are there, at the same time, various pleasing indications of life. I might point to the meetings and transactions of our Congregational Union,—to our congregational town and city mission agencies,—to our congregational Sab-

* It is not by this intended to be understood that there is any amount of this evil in the ministry of our churches in Scotland at present. I am far from thinking there is. And I am sure there is nothing against which the Tutors of the Theological Academy are more anxious to guard those under their charge. But the evil has found its way to our country. Its spread is justly dreaded; there being few things more tempting to the naturally ambitious spirit of youth, and few things, were the contagion becoming at all general, more fitted to lay the axe to the root of the spirituality and prosperity of the churches,—to provoke the Lord, indeed, to abandon them, and leave them to die.

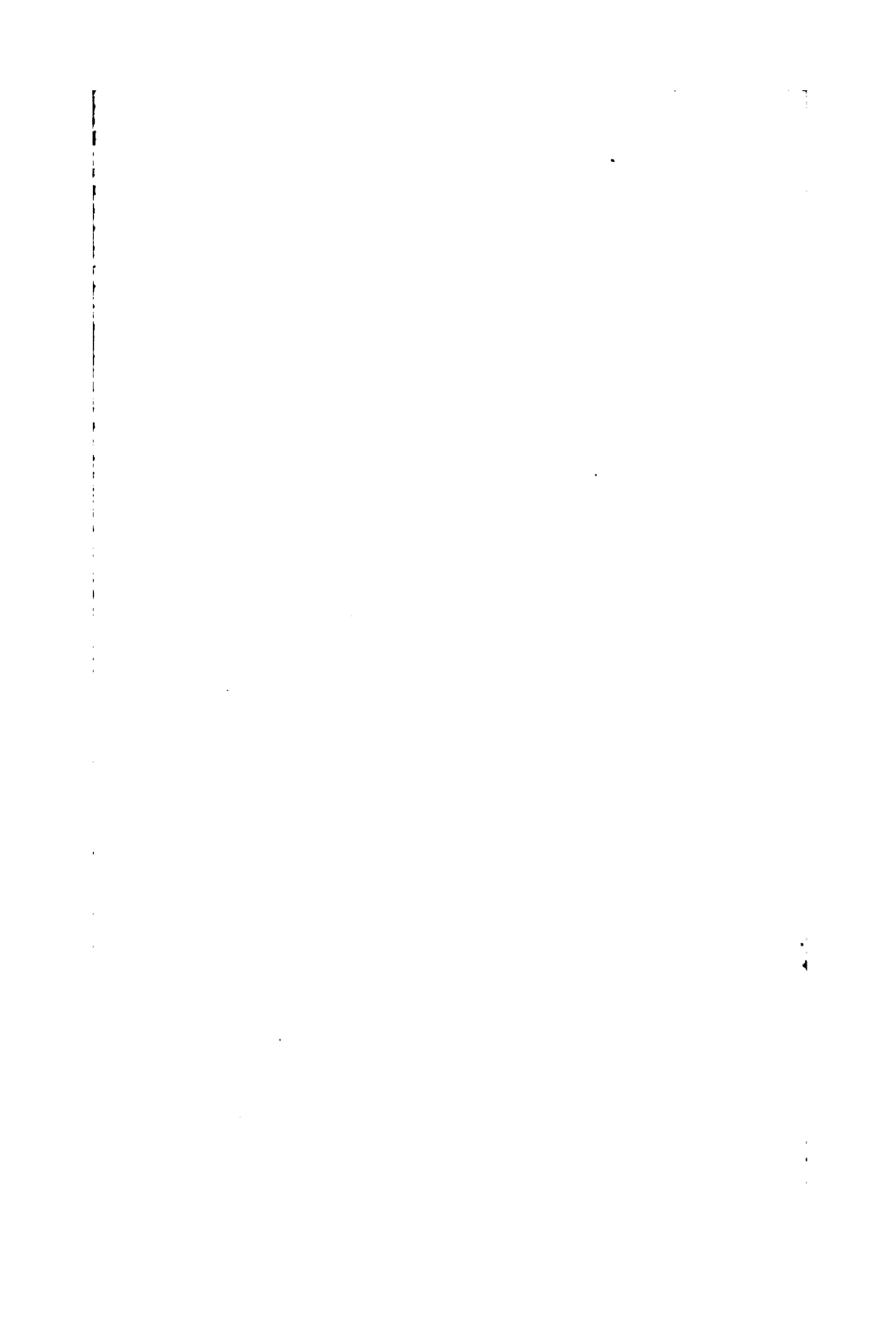
bath-school societies,—to our theological seminary,—to all that is contributed and all that is done amongst us for the spread of the gospel, both in our own and in heathen lands,—to our recent chapel-debt-liquidation scheme, so successfully carried into effect,—and to a variety of other topics, on which, amidst whatever grounds there may be for humiliation and amendment, we have some little satisfaction, and thankfulness to God, in thinking. They are evidences, that the fire, however low, is not extinct. There are still glowing, and more than glowing, embers. Let us but heap on fresh fuel, and look for the breath of the Spirit of God to kindle the flame; and all will be well.—And let us all remember that the work must begin *at home*. Our own souls must prosper, if the churches are to prosper. Every pastor, and every member, must furnish his quota of new and stimulating energy. And the louder is the call for this, in the ear of every individual, when the Lord is pleased to remove from us those who, so far as our dependence was on human agency, and on spiritual fidelity, and energy, and influence, were the pillars of our strength. The Lord supply the lack! The Lord raise up men of similar devotedness and power!—But, whatever be “the measure of the gift of Christ,” in pastors or in brethren, let it be put to use. Let none be idle. Let no talent be wrapt in a napkin, and buried in the earth. Let not any be found (these have been no rarity in times past, not in our own denomination alone but in all) bewailing the deadness of the churches, while they themselves are not only contri-

buting nothing to their life, but by their indolent and sentimental sighing and whining, only locking them still faster in the slumbers of spiritual death. "Awake, thou that sleepest." Awake, not to sigh, but to act; not to complain of the past, but to amend the future. The present, my brethren, is a crisis in your history; let it be a crisis in your position and character. The JUBILEE in Israel was a season of general rejoicing. But it was also, or ought to have been, a season of grateful recollection of Jehovah's goodness, and renewed consecration of person, and property, and life, to his service. Such be *your* jubilee. Let it be a time of revival; a time for the supplying of whatever is defective; the rectifying of whatever is amiss; the strengthening of whatever is weak; the raising up of whatever is depressed; the quickening of whatever is dying and dead. Let it not be a season of mere meeting, and talking, and social exhilaration; a time that passes away, and leaves the question to be afterwards asked with a sigh—*What has been the fruit?* Better far to have had none, than one of which this shall be the issue. It will do us harm, instead of good; harm in *our own souls*, for if it does not produce progress there, it will produce declension:—harm in *our reputation*, bringing upon us the scorn due to the man who "begins to build, and is not able to finish;"—we shall be called "clouds without water," "trees whose fruit withereth:"—and consequent harm in *our usefulness*, for, losing reputation, we shall proportionally lose influence. — "Awake, then, awake, put on strength." Think of the fearfulness of the threat-

ening—"I will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." The *candlesticks*, in the symbolical vision, are *the churches*. The removal of the candlestick, therefore, is not the mere withdrawal of privilege from the church, but *the extinction of the church itself*. Tremble, then, for this woe. And, while awed by the Lord's threatenings, be encouraged and animated by his promises. Where there is conscious declension, let there be resurrection. Let the "first love," wherever it has languished, come back, in a full and warm tide, and with pulses of returning energy, to every heart. Plan, and execute. Think, and act. Consult, and put forth united effort. Union is power.—Yet let it never be forgotten, that neither personal nor social exertion can have any other result than failure, without higher and mightier aid. "Go, in the strength of the Lord God." While Zion, at the divine rebuke, awakes, and puts on *her* strength,—she must, at the same time, feeling that strength to be but impotence, send up the prayer on high—"Awake, awake, put on *thy* strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in former days, and in the generations of old." *Without* God, all human strength is weakness; *with* God, human weakness is omnipotence. In this spirit of dependence, put heart and hand anew to the work of God;—and He will say, and be true to his word—"From this day will I bless you!" Let the prayer of pastors and members individually, and of all the churches collectively, be—"Save now, we beseech thee, O Lord:—O Lord, we beseech thee, send now prosperity!"

The principles we have been laying down and inculcating, are, in the full spirit of them, applicable to all fellow-Christians now hearing me, in their various denominational communions.—But there are some, perhaps not a few, among my hearers, who as yet know nothing, by any experience of their own, of *what a first love is*. I should violate the very obligations of which I have been reminding fellow-pastors, were I to close without one word to them. It must be brief; but it is affectionate and earnest. —Think, my dear fellow-sinners, for one moment, how you are treating your very best friend. You feel not, and own not, your obligations to him; and you see not, and admire not, his all-perfect loveliness. Would to God you did! It would be your life. While you wilfully shut out Christ, you are excluding from your minds the most precious of all knowledge,—the only knowledge of which it can be said—“This is life eternal;”—and from your hearts the light of the purest and most lasting joy. Be assured, he waits to be gracious. He seeks admission. If you open, he will instantly come in. O keep him no longer without. Mark his words. They are all-gracious. Mark, and obey:—“Behold, I stand at the door and knock:—if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” Then you will “taste and see that the Lord is good.” Then you will know the happiness of a “first love;” Christ’s love to you, and your love to Christ. And the reciprocations of this love, begun on earth and perfected in heaven, will be your blessedness for eternity!

A HISTORICAL SURVEY
OF
CONGREGATIONALISM IN SCOTLAND,
FROM ITS RISE IN 1798 TO 1812.
BY ROBERT KINNIBURGH.



HISTORICAL SURVEY.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS :—

WE are met to celebrate the fiftieth year of Congregationalism in Scotland,—to take a survey of the leading events of its history,—to call to remembrance the way in which the Lord led our fathers,—to express our obligations to him for the care which he so signally manifested towards them:—and to cherish the hope, that the grace which he has bestowed, during the past, will in the future not be withheld. It may be considered as a token for good, that the proposal to celebrate the present era has so readily met the approbation of our churches. Indeed, had such an occurrence been allowed to pass unobserved, it would have manifested a defective attachment to our distinctive principles as Congregationalists, if not ingratitude to Him from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift.

The religious movement, which began in 1798, has, by some of the wisest and best of men, been considered as little short of a revival of primitive Christianity: and the succession of years, in which it has been carried on, furnishes many striking illustrations of divine goodness to our sinful country. Before going

into particulars regarding this movement, we remark, that the people of Scotland were first made acquainted with the principles of Independency during the Commonwealth. When the Republican army invaded this country, under the command of Oliver Cromwell, John Owen and Joseph Carlyl were amongst its chaplains. The officers and private soldiers of the army employed much of their time during the intervals of action in preaching, reading the Scriptures, and holding conferences with the people; and although it does not appear that these exercises resulted in the formation of any Independent Churches, yet some knowledge of New Testament principles, regarding the Independent form of church order and government, must thereby have been disseminated, which probably prepared the way for the adoption of Independency at a future period. Mr. John Glas seems to have been the first, after the Commonwealth, to discover, and openly maintain in Scotland, correct views concerning the Messiah's kingdom, and the nature of a Christian church.* He formed an Independent Church at Tealing, near Dundee, in the year 1725. Sir William Sinclair, Bart., formed a Baptist Church at Keiss, county of Caithness, about the year 1760. Another Baptist Church was formed at Edinburgh in 1765, of which Messrs. Carmichael and M'Lean became joint pastors. Messrs. Ferrier and Smith, ministers in the Establishment, resigned their livings, and founded an Independent Church at Balchristie, Fife, in 1768. They were shortly after joined by

* London Congregational Magazine, vol. ii., p. 23.

Mr. David Dale and his friends, who have long been known by the name of "Old Scots Independents." These Churches all acted on Congregational principles, although differing in some things from each other; the Congregationalists of 1798 materially differed from all of them. The history of this latter body we now proceed to trace, from its rise in 1798 to 1812, when the Congregational Union came into existence; and we confine our survey within that period of years, because the events that then occurred are less known to the present generation; and because we deem that period sufficient to test the tendency of our avowed principles, and to show the progress both of truth and error amongst us, with their effects. May the survey lead to greater humility, prayer, watchfulness, zeal, and diligence!

As the close of last century drew near we heard "of wars and rumours of wars." "Upon the earth was distress of nations with perplexity, men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which were coming on the earth." There were great shakings and convulsions among the nations; but while the judgments of God were in the earth, Christians were roused from their apathy and slumbers, and hastened to devise means for sending the Gospel to the heathen. Thus the revolutions of empires and kingdoms were made subservient to the extension of Messiah's reign. Home was not forgotten,—numerous associations were formed in England, for the purpose of spreading a knowledge of the Gospel in the dark parts of that country, by village preaching, and other agencies. In Scotland,

about the same period, a similar spirit was excited, and the same means were extensively employed, to carry the like generous design into effect. More prayer meetings were then held than had been in former days; and one of the best signs of the times was the number of young men, who, in different places about that period, commenced weekly meetings for prayer and edification; some of whom afterwards became pastors or missionaries, and served the Lord with fidelity. For half a century previously, the pious in our native land had lamented the decay of practical godliness. Everywhere religious indifference and infidelity prevailed; but, while Christians mourned over this state of things, no exertions were made by them to remedy the evil. It was at this juncture that village preaching and extensive itinerancies were entered upon by Messrs. James Haldane and John Aikman. Their first attempt was made at the collier village of Gilmerton. Mr. Rate, a preacher from Dr. Bogue's academy at Gosport, at the request of Mr. John Campbell, preached at the village for two Sabbath evenings; but he being obliged to leave Edinburgh for a time, there was no one to supply Gilmerton on the third Sabbath evening. In this dilemma Mr. James Haldane urged Mr. Aikman to preach. At first he would not consent. However, he was afterwards gained over by Mr. Haldane telling him, that, if he would officiate on the first Sabbath evening, Mr. Haldane would engage to do so upon the following one. This offer touched the right chord in Mr. Aikman's warm heart, and constrained him to comply. Mr. Haldane

accordingly preached on the Sabbath evening thereafter. They continued to supply the village regularly in rotation for several Sabbath evenings, as well as on a week-day evening; and after the return of Mr. Rate to town, the three took their regular turns in preaching at the village. By and by Messrs. Haldane and Aikman began to think of extending their sphere of usefulness, and undertook a preaching tour to the north. These brethren were laymen; and laymen preaching like ministers was a novel thing in those days. More marvellous still, they were members of the Church of Scotland, visiting every parish that lay in their way, and preaching in the market-place or on the streets. The correctness of their views of the plan of salvation, and the earnestness of their addresses, gained for them attention, and secured to them large audiences. They had been taught by the religious discussions excited by several publications, and particularly by the "Missionary Magazine,"—then conducted by Mr. Ewing, while a minister of the Church of Scotland,—the propriety of engaging in itinerating labours, and preaching the Gospel as they might have opportunity. In that miscellany the opinion was ably maintained, that it was the right, nay the duty, of every Christian man, who knew the Gospel and felt its power, and who could state it with perspicuity, to declare it to his fellow sinners; an assertion which, notwithstanding the opposition it met with, has never yet received a satisfactory confutation. The discussion of this question created a very great sensation at the time.

These operations formed a new era in the religious history of our country. It was a strange and pleasant sight to contemplate two gentlemen, who had formerly been engaged in worldly pursuits, now devoting themselves to the service of Christ,—preaching and unfolding the truths of the everlasting Gospel, with clearness and energy, without licence from any church court.* Many rejoiced on seeing these itinerants take the field. Some, however, who encouraged them in the outset, at length withdrew their countenance, opposed and spake evil of the work ; while others, who beheld them and their labours at the beginning with indifference, afterwards became friendly and zealous in the cause.

In a short time the religious aspect of the country was greatly altered,—vital godliness began to revive,—the Bible was more generally and more attentively read than formerly,—a spirit of inquiry was awakened,—some of the dark places saw the light of life, and not a few of our countrymen were turned to the Lord.

It was in the autumn of 1797 that Messrs. Hal-dane and Aikman made their first tour to the northern counties. They preached in the towns and vil-

* Milton, in a tract entitled,—“ Considerations touching the likeliest means to remove Hirelings out of the Church,” says, “ Our ministers think scorn to use a trade, and count it the reproach of this age, that tradesmen preach the Gospel. It were to be wished they were all tradesmen ; they would not then, so many of them, for want of another trade, make a trade of their preaching: and yet they clamour that tradesmen preach ; and yet they preach, while they themselves are the worst tradesmen of all.”

lages on their way north. From Burgh-head they sailed to Orkney, where they arrived in time for an annual fair held at Kirkwall. A revival of religion had just commenced there before their arrival. It began by the labours of some Antiburgher ministers, but was greatly promoted by the itinerant exertions of Messrs. Haldane and Aikman. During the fair, which lasted ten days, our brethren preached regularly morning and evening to audiences of 2,000, 3,000, 4,000, so that, in the evenings particularly, "the fair was in a great measure emptied." After it was over, our friends left Kirkwall on a preaching tour to the country parishes and the isles. These islands, for a period beyond the memory of any man then living, had been—except on one or two occasions—as destitute of the Gospel, so far as regarded the preaching of it, as any of the islands in the Pacific ocean.

When our brethren had fulfilled their mission to Orkney they returned to Caithness, where they continued for six weeks. In various parts of that country thousands assembled to hear, when many said, What new doctrine is this? and not a few were awakened from their carnal repose, and gladly received the Word. Caithness, at that time and for nearly half a century before, had enjoyed very little evangelical preaching.

After taking leave of Caithness, the two brethren returned by Inverness, where they found Mr. Rate, who had accompanied them thither, and had remained preaching in that town and neighbourhood. The three brethren then returned to Edinburgh, preach-

ing at most of the towns by the way. When they reached home they gave so deplorable an account of the state of religion, as induced some of the friends of the Redeemer to consider whether any thing could be done, more effectually, to enlighten the dark parts of our native land. Events of a singular nature contributed not a little to promote such an inquiry. Mr. Robert Haldane having, sometime previously, had his attention directed to divine things, and seeing their suitableness to the state of guilty man, felt the importance of spreading among the Heathen those truths which had given comfort and hope to his own soul. Under this impression he sold his estate, and along with other associates,—men of talent and exemplary piety,—he intended to employ his fortune in diffusing among the tribes of Hindostan the blessings of religion. Upon application to the East India Company, however, for liberty to found an establishment in the East Indies, for propagating the gospel, the proposal was rejected. While Mr. Haldane was using every means in his power to obtain leave to carry out his intentions regarding India, a bitter invective was poured on him and his associates in a book published by Professor Robison, entitled “Proofs of Conspiracy.” This led to a correspondence on the part of Messrs. Haldane and Ewing with the author, which resulted in his retracting in the newspapers part of the foul calumny of the publication; but the retraction was unsatisfactory to those calumniated; still bad motives were ascribed to them; their political sentiments were misrepresented, and the proposed mission was held

up as one that would be dangerous to the government of India.* But the timid policy of interested men, and the opposition of influential enemies, only served to direct benevolence into another channel. Disappointed in his designs of going abroad, Mr. Haldane turned his attention to the state of religion in his native land, and resolved to employ his fortune in propagating the gospel at home.

The report brought from the North by Messrs. James Haldane and Aikman, regarding its religious destitution, confirmed Mr. Robert Haldane in his resolutions regarding his native country. Accordingly, various individuals, members of the Established Church, held a meeting on the 20th of December, 1797, and formed "The Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home." And at the first General Meeting on the 11th January, 1798, the following gentlemen were appointed to compose the Committee of Directors:—James Christie, Robert Haldane, Alexander Johnstone, John Campbell, George Gibson, John Aikman, Robert Morris, Walter Russell, James Haldane, John Greig, Andrew Rothead, John Ritchie, Secretary, A. Steel, Treasurer, Geo. Wilson, Clerk. The Society consisted of persons of various denominations, holding unity of faith in the leading doctrines of Christianity. The simple object of it was to disseminate religious knowledge in Scotland. Its

* See an interesting "Address to the Public concerning Political Opinions and Plans lately adopted to promote Religion in Scotland." By Robert Haldane. The Address contains also the correspondence referred to. It is reviewed in the *Miss. Mag.* for 1800, pp. 248, 311.

agents were, first, Catechists,—pious young men, whose duty it was to plant and superintend evening schools in villages, confining the attention of children to religion. In the second class of agents were Ministers of known character, brought from England, as, Messrs. Rowland Hill, Bennet, Slatterie, Burder, Taylor, Loader, Parsons, Hey, Bogue, Rate, and others; besides those who had been raised up in Scotland, as Messrs. J. Haldane, Aikman, Ewing, Garrie, Innes, Cleghorn, Ballantyne, and Ward. These all itinerated more or less in our towns and villages, and were eminently useful to the cause.

Mr. Ward was minister of the Episcopal chapel, Old Deer, Aberdeenshire, and had agreed to itinerate under the inspection of the Society. The chief design of the Society was to send forth men to preach the Gospel in those parts of Scotland, where the truth was not made known in its purity, or where it was not regularly dispensed; and it is unquestionable that the formation and exertions of the Society were considerably facilitated by the progress of opinion,—by the corruptions of the church,—and by the religious discussions of the day.

In the spring of 1798 some pious individuals, who wished to see the interests of religion extended in Edinburgh, resolved to open an additional place of worship in the city, where preaching should be kept up by a succession of ministers, and where the accommodation should be free to all, on the plan of Whitefield's chapels. Accordingly, on the 29th of July, the Circus was opened by Mr. Rowland Hill. It was taken merely as a place for preaching, and as

an experiment, whether it would be prudent to erect a place for worship, and of what size. It was to be identified with no particular denomination, but to be equally allied to all, who held the doctrine of salvation, by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was at length resolved to build a large place of worship, to be called "The Tabernacle." A central site of ground was obtained, at the head of Leith Walk, only a few hundred yards from the Circus, on which a building was soon erected, capable of containing about three thousand two hundred persons, which for some years was every Sabbath nearly filled with hearers, and very often crowded to excess. The whole expense of the building was defrayed by Mr. Robert Haldane. Dr. Struthers, in his "History of the Relief Church," says, that, "The Tabernacle plan was undoubtedly an instrument, in the hand of God, for effecting incalculable good,—that the new denomination was sound in its doctrinal and evangelical views, and could promise, on rational grounds, that what the Puritans or Independents had done for England it would do for Scotland, holding, as it did, the same principles, and preaching the same truths."* He also says, "The Tabernacle people, as they were called, were raised up to supply the Gospel under a new denomination, at a time when the public mind was excited, and prepared to listen to an order of religious teachers, who had more of activity, and less of form to cramp their exertions, than any of the other denominations."†

* P. 391.

† P. 387.

In the summer of 1798 Messrs. Haldane and Aikman itinerated throughout most parts of the Southern Counties of Scotland, where also they found a great lack of evangelical preaching. Mr. Rate was employed at the same time preaching in the towns and villages of Fifeshire, where the common people heard him gladly; but in some places he met with great opposition from the common enemy.

It was on the 1st Dec. of that year, that Mr. Greville Ewing gave up his connection with the Established Church; and the first use he made of freedom from ecclesiastical restraint, was an itinerancy to various parts of Perthshire. Having signified to the Society his willingness to go out on a short tour, his offer was cordially accepted. Accordingly, on the 14th December, 1798, he left Edinburgh for Perth. From his Journal we find that during his tour his labours were chiefly confined to Dunkeld and the parishes adjoining. Although the season was unfavourable, it appears that he preached daily to large and attentive audiences, and on getting home he said, "I am more convinced than ever of the utility, importance, and pleasantness of itinerating. May many run to and fro, and may knowledge be increased! for at present, many are evidently perishing for lack of it."

In 1799, Messrs. Haldane and Aikman again visited the North. They were accompanied by Mr. Innes, who had just left the Establishment, and afterwards published his reasons for doing so. Mr. Aikman remained in Orkney, confirming the souls of the disciples, and preaching the Word, while Messrs.

Haldane and Innes went on to Shetland, where they continued six weeks, preaching to large congregations. At that time Shetland contained a population of about 26,000, and was divided into 30 parishes, placed under the care of only 12 ministers, not more than two or three of whom preached the Gospel; consequently the religious state of the country was most deplorable. The earnest and rousing addresses of our brethren broke in upon the dangerous repose of the people, exciting a spirit of inquiry there before unknown, when, by the blessing of God, not a few were turned to righteousness.

In consequence of so novel a state of things, an alarm was sounded, from the pulpit and the press, throughout the length and breadth of Scotland; and not a few of the Presbyterian Dissenters were as loud in denouncing the itinerant preachers as were the Established clergy. The Relief Synod, at their meeting in 1798, passed the following decree: "That no minister, belonging to this body, shall give, or allow his pulpit to be given, to any person, who has not attended a regular course of philosophy and divinity, in some of the universities of the nation; and who has not been regularly licensed to preach the Gospel." This was evidently intended to exclude from their pulpits the English ministers and others engaged in itinerancies; "but this illiberal act," Dr. Struthers says, "was, in 1811, allowed to drop out of their code of regulations, as something of which they were ashamed."* We find from the

* P. 405.

records of the General Associate or Antiburgher Synod, that in 1796, the Synod passed a resolution against the constitution of missionary societies, composed of ministers and laymen, and testified against co-operating with persons in religious matters, while, as a church, they were testifying against their opinions. And in the same illiberal spirit, on the 2d May, 1798, the Synod "agreed unanimously in declaring, that as lay preaching has no warrant in the word of God, and as the Synod has always considered it their duty to testify against promiscuous communion, no person, under the inspection of the Synod, can consistently with their principles attend upon or give countenance to public preaching by any who are not of our communion. And if any do so, they ought to be dealt with by the judicatories of the church, to bring them to a sense of their offensive conduct." Equal bigotry was shown by the Cameronian church at Glasgow; for when some of its members attended a missionary sermon, preached by Dr. Balfour on behalf of the Glasgow Missionary Society, the Presbytery declared their conduct "*sinful and offensive*." The Session was instructed "to deal with them, and to endeavour to bring them to a sense of the *sinfulness* and *offensiveness* thereof, and to censure them accordingly." And because they would not submit to the sentence, they were expelled from the denomination!

Such a sectarian spirit being then abroad in Scotland, need we be surprised to find our brethren, in their itinerant labours, meeting with keen opposition. Dr. Struthers tells us, that "The missionary minis-

ters, in their preaching tours, drew around them immense crowds, and before the close of 1799, nearly 30 or 40,000 tracts had been circulated, and nearly 40 catechists were travelling throughout the length and breadth of the land. The whole of the North of Scotland was thrown into a blaze. The clergy complained that the world was going out of its place, and the old landmarks of things, both civil and sacred, were fast disappearing." He adds: "The missionaries, as they were called, were found preaching in every village and Highland glen, and in every locality they had their schools and their lay agency, which trenched on Presbyterian order, and clerical superintendence. Church courts, both dissenting and established, took the alarm, and brought their antagonistic power and influence to bear on them."*

Charges were brought against the Society and its agents of holding opinions subversive of every thing valuable to society, and "*which tended to promote sedition, treason, and rebellion;*" and in the famous Pastoral Admonition of the General Assembly of 1799, they were accused of being "*artful and designing men, disaffected to the civil constitution of the country, holding secret meetings, and abusing the name of liberty, as a cover for secret democracy and anarchy.*" This calumnious epistle was answered, and its accusations triumphantly rebutted by the Society, also by Messrs. R. Hill, Burder, and Ewing, and by "A Plain Man, a Member of the Church of Scotland." The advice of Gamaliel might with propriety

* Pp. 402, 403.

have been given to the General Assembly on that occasion—"Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought, but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

Dr. Alexander, in his "Memoir of John Watson," justly styles the "Pastoral Admonition a noisy, blustering, bigoted tirade, against those who were seeking to convey to the people that spiritual instruction and nourishment for which they looked in vain to those to whom the State had intrusted their religious interests." Doubtless the zeal, piety, and earnestness of the Itinerant preachers, Catechists, and Sabbath school teachers, provoked the Assembly to adopt their intolerant measures; but, as persecution generally does, it turned "out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." The public were astonished and indignant at such a display of bigotry; and many of the pious so keenly felt the injustice and intolerance of the whole affair, that they were constrained to unite themselves to the injured party. Mr. Rowland Hill at the time quaintly said, "Brethren, we will shine all the brighter for the scrubbing we have got from the General Assembly." But the effects of the Pastoral Admonition fell heavily on the Society's preachers, catechists, and Sabbath school teachers. They soon met with decided opposition from many of the parochial clergy, and were greatly annoyed by them. This led the Society to memorialize council on the subject. We have in our possession an interesting document,—“Answers to the

Memorial and Query, for the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home, by Henry David Inglis, Esquire, Advocate, 24th August, 1799." The answers contain his opinion how far preachers, catechists, school-masters, and Sabbath school teachers were protected by law, and could or could not be disturbed, either by the Established church or by the civil magistrate. The replies state decidedly, that the Society and its agents were protected in all their operations by the law of the land. This encouraged them to proceed, fearless of opposition.

It was said too, that the plans pursued by the Society, and its agents, were the results of a deep laid scheme, in which every circumstance was previously arranged; but nothing could be more false, for, on the contrary, like most things in human affairs, they arose one out of another, frequently without the agents in them perceiving the next step they were to take. When they commenced operations, none of them had left the Establishment, nor did it seem to themselves, for a while, so obvious as it did to others, that such a step was likely to be the result of the line of conduct, which they had begun to pursue. Even when the Circus was opened, as a place of worship, no idea was entertained of forming another religious party. The sole aim of those concerned in it was the conversion of sinners, and a revival of religion.

They soon, however, saw the necessity of a more decided separation from the world, and a stricter adherence to New Testament principles; for in December of that year (1798), 12 or 14 individuals

met in a house in George Street, Edinburgh, and formed themselves into a church for Christian fellowship.

This in a great measure resulted from the labours of the English ministers, who in succession had officiated in the Circus. "Some of them preached on the nature of a church of Christ; the materials of which it is composed; its statute-book or laws, by which it is governed, viz. the New Testament." These discourses caused "some to entertain Independent views of a church, and church government, which led to the formation of the Circus church, and to the election of Mr. James Haldane to be the pastor thereof." As soon as it was known that the church was formed, various applications were made for fellowship, and all, whose cases were found satisfactory, were admitted. "After this, the number of church members rapidly increased, from persons converted during their attendance on the preaching of the gospel, and others who had long entertained Independent views of a church of Christ, from reading the writings of John Glas, especially his 'Testimony of the King of Martyrs.' "* According to a list in our possession, the number of church members at that early period amounted to 272, besides 38 occasional communicants.

Mr. Aikman—one of the few who composed the Circus church at the outset—nine years afterwards, gave the following account of the principles on which it was formed. He says:—"The chief principle which

* "Life and Times of John Campbell," p. 281.

influenced the minds of the brethren, who I believe constituted the majority of the small company first associated for observing divine ordinances in the Circus, was the indispensable necessity of the people of God being separated in religious fellowship from all such societies as permitted visible unbelievers to continue in their communion. This was a yoke under which we had long groaned; and we hailed with gratitude to God, the arrival of that happy day when we first enjoyed the so much wished for privilege of separating from an impure communion, and of uniting exclusively with those whom it was meet and fit that we should judge to be all the children of God. Some of our dearest brethren, however, did not unite with us on this principle. They were attached indeed to the fellowship of the saints, and would by no means consent to the admission of any amongst us who did not appear to be such; yet they were not then convinced of the absolute unlawfulness of their continuing in connexion with societies confessedly impure. Our brethren were well aware of our decided difference of sentiment, not only respecting the great inconsistency, but also unlawfulness of any persons connected with us continuing to go back to the fellowship of those societies from which they had professed to separate, and they knew that our forbearance did not imply any approbation of this conduct. Persuaded, however, that they did not intend by this to countenance any thing they judged to be contrary to the mind of Christ, we deemed it our duty to forbear, in the hope that that Saviour whom we trusted it was their supreme de-

sire to serve and to please, would grant us the happiness of being like minded in this, as in our other views of promoting the honour of his adored name."* This church observed the Lord's supper only once a-month from the time of its formation till the year 1802, when it adopted weekly communion. But the change was not made till Mr. Ewing had shown its practical working in the church at Glasgow, for more than two years; and Mr. James Haldane had issued an address to the members of the church under his care on the subject.† Previous to the formation of this church, one had been formed in Paisley, and another in Aberdeen.

These being the two oldest churches in the connection, we shall notice some circumstances, which gave rise to their formation:—The church in Paisley was formed in 1795, as appears from their Hymn Book, bearing date 1796, published, according to the testimony of some old members, the year after their being united in fellowship. This church originated at the time of the great agitation of "the friends of the people." A number of pious people began then to see that reform was needed in the church as well as in the state; but having no hope of working any reformation in the church established by law, they sought relief in dissent, by forming themselves into

* "Observations on Exhortation in the Churches of Christ, intended to show that the indiscriminate and spontaneous Teaching of Private Members, on the Lord's day, is not authorized in the New Testament." Addressed to the Church in North College Street, Edinburgh. By John Aikman.

† *Miss. Mag.*, pp. 183, 239.

an Independent church, continuing to meet for a time in a malt barn. The labours of Mr. Witherspoon and Dr. Snodgrass, ministers in Paisley, had awakened much attention to the principles of civil and religious freedom, which they expounded boldly with great freedom of speech. Some good men who were their disciples used to ascribe the formation of the Independent church there to the instrumentality of these two ministers, who themselves never intended to go so far as their doctrine led the more intelligent and faithful of their hearers. The church had learned something of nonconformity in England, but knew not how to apply to that quarter for a preacher; when they heard of a Mr. Wylie in the Burgher Secession, who was said to teach strange things,—thereby causing some stir in a village near Paisley. On getting acquainted with him they found him to be a man to their mind, and he soon accepted their call to become their pastor—which was followed by the building a chapel capable of accommodating 500 people. Mr. Wylie, after labouring among them, for a short time, with considerable success, became a Baptist, and went to Liverpool. The church, however, continued to meet in the chapel, at the regular hours of worship, on the Lord's day, for devotional exercises, reading the Scriptures, and occasionally exhorting each other; till Mr. Ewing and the students of the first class arrived in Glasgow. Then a deputation of the church in Paisley waited on Mr. Ewing for mutual explanation of principles, when they found between them a recognition of all the essentials of Christian unity.

From this period Mr. Ewing and the students supplied them with sermon, till the class had finished their course of study in the end of 1800, when Mr. Young was sent as a regular supply, and afterwards became their pastor.*

The church in George Street, Aberdeen, was formed towards the close of the year 1797.

The following extract from the Minute Book of this church will show the circumstances which gave rise to its formation:—

“Aberdeen, September 1797.—For some time past several persons here observed and lamented, that most churches or parties are remarkably strict in demanding assent and subscription to human creeds and confessions of faith,—remarkably lax in their inquiries into the knowledge, experience, and moral character of such as desire admission,—remarkably languid and indifferent about the one thing needful, and very zealous about some things needless. By searching the Scriptures and other books with attention, these persons conceived a high opinion of the Protestant dissenters called Independents. They conversed about these things occasionally, and although belonging to different communions, they perceived that the love of God in the heart is a more sweet and steady union than a professed belief of any human creed. Thus, by occasional interviews and conversations, they became more intimate and familiar, till at length a meeting was proposed solely to consider the subject.”

* Substance of an account by Mr. George Robertson, long pastor of the church in Paisley.

Accordingly they met, and, after much prayer, they agreed to meet statedly for prayer and conversation about the matter. At length they formed themselves into a church upon New Testament principles; and invited Mr. James Bennet of Romsey, (now Dr. Bennet of London,) to visit them and open a chapel, which they had built, capable of containing a thousand people. On the 16th Sept., 1798, Mr. Bennet preached at the opening of their place of worship, and explained and defended the Congregational mode of church fellowship. At the close of the sermon, the members of the infant church rose and declared their adoption of the Congregational system, and avowed their church relation by giving to each other the right hand of fellowship. The brethren resolved to unite liberality with purity,—to abandon the lax worldly system of communion,—and to admit to occasional fellowship all who gave evidence of conversion, although differing from them in their modes and forms; and that the pulpit of their chapel should be open to faithful ministers of every denomination, who preached Christ Jesus and him crucified.*

If our space permitted, we should gladly notice the circumstances which gave rise to the formation of others of the churches. Suffice it to say, that generally they had their origin in prayer and fellowship meetings. These meetings were rallying points to

* For farther information regarding the early history of the Aberdeen church, we would refer the reader to Dr. Alexander's Memoir of John Watson.

the pious, and gave them an opportunity of becoming acquainted with each other's sentiments, feelings, and principles. They conversed freely over the word of God, prayed to be more perfectly taught, gradually obtained light regarding the laws and order of Christ's house; and, on being satisfied on these points, they formed themselves into church connection by prayer and fasting,—giving to each other the right hand of fellowship, and agreeing to observe the ordinances of the gospel as contained in the New Testament. In not a few instances, however, the churches were composed chiefly of those who had been brought to the knowledge of the truth by the labours of itinerants, or others of the preachers, who, after having proclaimed the gospel, taught those who believed it, to observe all things whatsoever Christ hath commanded.

By the end of 1800, there were nine other churches formed in different parts of the country, making in all fourteen. At that period there seemed to be a preparation, as it were, in the country generally, especially in the minds of many of the pious, to receive other sentiments on the constitution of the church than those of the communion in which they had been brought up.

Pious ministers of the Establishment, who could not preach, except by invitation, beyond the bounds of their own parishes, had hitherto highly approved of the efforts made by the itinerants to disseminate pure and undefiled religion. Their complaints of their Moderate brethren were just and loud. They viewed the itinerants as auxiliaries to the kirk, and

for a time they befriended them; but when they saw churches formed on Congregational principles, they felt alarmed, got jealous of the preachers, withdrew their countenance, and opposed them. For the same reason, others, who had acted a friendly part to the Society, ceased to give it any longer their support. However, there were some connected with the Established church who continued to countenance it until it ceased its operations in 1807.

Village Preaching.

During the early years of Congregationalism amongst us, there were in some of the larger churches individuals, who, on Sabbath evenings, were wont to go to the neighbouring villages to preach the Gospel to the people; and some of these individuals became, by the faithful exercise of their gifts, burning and shining lights in the Church of God. It is cause of regret that this primitive practice has of late years, in a great measure, been neglected. In most churches there are those who possess gifts, which, if properly directed, might prove very useful. And notwithstanding the great increase of Gospel light in our time, there are many of our villages still in much need of the Word of life.

Seminaries.

“The Society” finding it difficult to procure a competent number of ministers to itinerate, and supply

stations with preaching, seminaries were established for educating young men of genuine piety possessed of talents, susceptible of cultivation, and who were desirous to be useful to souls. The organization of these seminaries was a wise measure. Their salutary effects on the cause they sought to promote were soon apparent, and the benefits derived from their operations have been long felt and acknowledged.

CLASSES.

I. The *first* class began in January 1799, under the tuition of Mr. Ewing. One of this class, after having been a minister of the Gospel for nearly fifty years, writes,—“Our class was selected from the different bodies of Presbyterians, and when placed under Mr. Ewing’s care, I am not aware that there was a single individual amongst us, that could be called a Congregationalist in sentiment. . . . Mr. Ewing’s plan was, to make the Bible its own interpreter, by comparing one part with another. In this way Congregational principles insinuated themselves, almost imperceptibly, into our minds. . . . We had an opportunity in the Circus church of seeing Congregational principles embodied and exemplified; and comparing what we saw with the apostolic epistles, our Presbyterian principles were shaken, and ultimately became totally untenable. But with some of us the change was very gradual.”*—The class removed to Glasgow, with Mr. Ewing, in May

* Greville. Ewing’s Memoir, p. 195.

of the same year ; and he commenced his ministerial labours there on the 28th of July in the Circus, which had been purchased by Mr. Haldane, and fitted up as a place of worship. In December, 1800, the class completed their term of study, and were sent to different stations as preachers. In it were John Munro, George Robertson, &c.

II. The *second* class commenced in January 1800, at Dundee, under Mr. Innes, who had gone thither to supply with ministerial services the Tabernacle, which was then building ; and which was opened, as a place of worship, on the 19th October of that year. In this class were a few who had been catechists, and who were found to possess talents capable of being trained for the ministry. In the early part of 1801 all this class was removed to Glasgow, and was under Mr. Ewing for fifteen months. In it were Dr. Paterson, Alex. Thomson, &c.

After conducting to a termination the studies of this second class, Mr. Ewing relinquished his connection with the seminary, which was then transferred to Edinburgh.

III. In 1801 the *third* class began at Dundee, under Mr. Innes, but its students met with a very serious interruption, being sent for a time to supply stations with preaching at the end of the first year. They, however, came to Edinburgh in 1804, and finished their term of study. In this class were Francis Dick, Alex. Kerr, &c.

IV. The *fourth* class began in Edinburgh in 1802, under Messrs. Aikman and Wemyss, with the addition of Mr. Stephens towards the close of

the second year. In it were Wm. Henry, Peter M'Laren, &c.

V. In 1803 a *fifth* class was organized under Messrs. Aikman, Wemyss and Stephens, Mr. Cowie taking Mr. Aikman's place during the second year. In it were Dr. Russell, John Watson, &c.

VI. The *sixth* class began in 1804, under Messrs. Wemyss, Stephens, and Cowie, for the first year, but were under Mr. Cowie alone during the second year. In this class were Alex. Knowles, John Black, &c.

VII. The *seventh* class assembled in 1805. In it were William Orme, John Neave, &c. This and the next class were under Messrs. Cowie and Walker.

VIII. The *eighth* class met in September 1806. In it were Thomas Smith, Robert Aikenhead, &c. Mr. Cowie resigned the tutorship in the spring of 1808.

IX. A *ninth* class was formed in the end of 1807, and was under the care of Mr. William Walker, till December 1808, when the seminary was given up after having sent out nearly 300 preachers.

The course of study of these classes generally extended over two years, with a vacation of six weeks in each year, and embraced English grammar and rhetoric, the elements of Greek and Hebrew—the last three classes had Latin in addition—lectures on systematic theology, and essays upon prescribed subjects. Each student, in rotation, delivered sermons before the class, the tutor making his remarks. One day, in each week, all were required to speak in rotation from a passage of Scripture appointed for that purpose, the tutor making concluding observations. The students were supported,—had medical attendance

when needed,—their education and class books were given them,—and they had access to a large and well-selected library,—all at the expense of Mr. Robert Haldane.* Although, in consequence of the urgent demand for labourers, the young men were sent out with more meagre attainments than would have been proper in other circumstances, yet among them there were very many who would have done honour to any of the religious bodies of the day :—Dr. Struthers, speaking of these seminaries, says :—“ Among the 300 sent forth from these classes, before they were altogether given up, there were some *choice spirits* who, having got a start in learning, pushed on their private studies with vigour, and obtained success.”† This is quite correct. There were “ *choice spirits* ” among them, some of whom subsequently made attainments in actual scholarship, equal to and beyond the attainments of many who boast of their university education ;‡ while others of them, although they

* In a memoir of Mr. Haldane, in the Evangelical Magazine, Feb. 1843, it is stated, that, “ In a publication of Mr. Haldane’s, he calculated that his expenditure on chapels alone exceeded £31,000, while it is certain, that on general objects he spent almost as much as upon chapels, even without including the education of nearly 300 preachers,”—which must have cost him upwards of £20,000. Thus, at a moderate calculation, it would seem that Mr. Haldane expended upwards of £80,000 on objects connected with the spread of the Gospel in Scotland. What a noble instance of devotedness to the cause of the Redeemer! Has it a parallel in the history of our country? We think not.

† History of the Relief Church, p. 402.

‡ Rowland Hill, in his Journal through the North of England and parts of Scotland, says :—“ Such is the wisdom of

did not aspire to be erudite scholars, yet, by diligent application, rose to eminence as preachers and writers. Speaking generally, those sent out from the seminaries were men befitting the times in which they lived. They were raised up in mercy to a perishing world. And if they did not succeed in drawing multitudes to their chapels, it must be ascribed, in a great measure, to the unbending principles which they ever maintained. Thus, a succession of efficient preachers was secured, on a plan adapted to the necessities of the times, and which provided for the supply of their wants, without presenting any temptation to those to embark in the cause whose avarice was greater than their zeal for doing good.

Sabbath Evening Schools.

Not only did the pastors of Congregational churches manifest great activity, zeal, and self-denial, in the promotion of the Redeemer's cause in Scotland; but the members also of these churches, in many instances, displayed fearless decision, and much self-denial, in seeking to promote the spiritual interest of their fellow-creatures, especially amongst the rising generation. It was in the early days of Congregationalism

the Church of Scotland, that the question with them respecting learning is, not *if he has it*, but *where he got it*; no matter for the *thing*, the *place* is all; the learning of the most learned is nothing, unless procured at a *learned place*; and I will venture to assert, as a proof of this, that many went after it to the *right place*, and never got it, and yet were sure to get the living whenever presented."

that Sabbath evening schools began, and their most zealous and active promoters were Congregationalists. Much opposition was shown to these nurseries of the church, and especially to those who conducted them; but such true-hearted men were not to be scared from their work,—they steadily persevered; and, finally, by the blessing of God, prevailed. In a parish in Morayshire a Sabbath evening school was opened. This roused the indignation of the Parochial clergy. The teachers were summoned, cajoled, and threatened, but they refused to yield. Recourse was then had to the strong arm of the law. An interdict was laid upon them; but neither did this answer the end. Teachers from Elgin—a distance of 15 or 16 miles—went and taught the school, until the original teachers were honourably acquitted. One of Mr. Cowie of Huntly's members being summoned to appear before the Presbytery of Turriff, to give an account of his conduct as a teacher of one of these schools, received a letter from his pastor, saying:—"It is my opinion that you should not go near the presbytery, nor mind their summons. They cannot imprison you, as they have no civil power; and, if any of them call upon you, you may tell them you have commenced being a preacher, and this will free you from all trouble. Only you must exhort as well as examine, in order to act up to your new character as a preacher. And, if questioned, I shall give you a license to preach. Three of the oldest advocates of that time gave it as their opinion that Sabbath schools are of the nature of religious exercises, and came under the toleration act, which in Scotland is very ample and full; and

that the law does not require the teachers to take the oaths to government unless they please." *

A peculiar feature in most, if not all, of the earlier Sabbath schools of Scotland, was the attendance of many parents and other adults, whose presence induced the teachers to tender to them a word of exhortation at the end of the meeting, which the clergy considered a modification of the system of lay-preaching, and opposed.

THE HIGHLANDS.

We shall advert for a little, in tracing this movement, to some parts of the Highlands:—It was in the year 1800, when the Gospel began to be preached in the Highlands by the agents of the Society. In September of that year, Messrs. James Haldane and John Campbell visited Kintyre in Argyleshire, and preached the Gospel through that extensive district. There they did not meet with one person whom they had any reason to conclude to be a Christian; nor did they hear of any means of salvation enjoyed by the poor people, except the Scriptures, which lay in the presses of some houses as useless lumber. Mr. Campbell reported that, "for seventy miles, except in the town of Campbelton, there was not a minister who preached the Gospel." From the representation which the two brethren made to the Society, of the religious destitution of

* Dr. Morison's Tribute of Filial Sympathy to the Memory of a Beloved Father, pp. 139, 140.

the country, Mr. M'Callum was sent to Kintyre as an itinerant. He was a native of that country, and had been long desirous to preach the Gospel to his countrymen. He had studied at the Glasgow university, and afterwards under Mr. Ewing. He was a man of great piety, prudence, and zeal. He entered upon his labours in the latter end of 1800, under many discouragements. For the first six months he saw no fruit attending his labours, but, in the summer of 1801, the word was blessed to many. His ministrations differed so widely from anything the people had been accustomed to witness, that they soon attracted attention in various parts of the country, and many were turned to the Lord. Prayer-meetings were established; and by and by a church was formed, consisting of 55 members, which rapidly increased. Mr. Farquharson, about the same time, was sent to Breadalbane, in Perthshire, which was also very destitute of Evangelical preaching. So great was the opposition to him when he commenced his labours, that, in a circle of 32 miles around Loch Tay, *three* families only would receive him into their houses, and every inn or public house was shut against him. Notwithstanding of opposition, he continued to teach and preach Jesus Christ; and the hand of the Lord being with him, a considerable awakening soon took place; and by and by a church was formed of 70 members, which increased in a short time to 100; but the more good that was done, the greater was the opposition to the preacher and to the new converts. The separation of the disciples both in Kintyre and Breadalbane caused no

small stir. Families were divided, false reports were raised and circulated, for the purpose of bringing the new converts into disrepute. Violent measures were devised and accomplished to deprive them of their houses and farms, and in not a few instances were their lives in jeopardy; but they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that in heaven they had a better and enduring substance. They thought less of their sufferings than of the happiness of suffering for Christ. Here it deserves to be noticed, that when the work was going on in Breadalbane, there were instances in which, when the converts acted with decision, persecution gradually subsided, but where there was apparent wavering, it increased.

We cannot forbear here putting on record a few of the striking instances of conversion which happened in the Highlands about the beginning of the present century. They have been communicated to us by two of our aged ministers as reminiscences of their early days.

The Consistent Daughters.—The consistent conduct of the disciples in many cases produced the happiest effects. Four young people in one family were converted. They frequently spoke to their father about his soul in the most affectionate manner. This sometimes irritated him, and roused his indignation. At times, however, when at home and hearing them speaking, observing the love that subsisted among them, and their general good conduct, he would be favourably disposed towards them; but when he went abroad, whether to kirk or market, his anger was roused against them by the wicked insinuations

of those with whom he had come into contact. His fifth and youngest child became also concerned about her soul. That all his children should be affected in the same way, and be all concerned about his salvation—and that they should continue their kindness and exercise such patience towards him, notwithstanding his opposition to them—made a considerable impression on his mind. He, therefore, resolved to hear Mr. Farquharson for himself. He went, and was much affected by what he heard. In a short time he gave evidence of conversion; and, to the great joy of his family, was admitted to the fellowship of the Church.

The Poachers and Smuggler.—In some instances the conduct of the new converts attracted the attention of worldly men so as to excite their admiration:—"A number of young men were in the frequent habit of poaching on the marquis of Breadalbane's ground, and they were generally brought annually before his lordship, who usually dismissed them with a threatening rebuke. One of these, who was a smuggler as well as a poacher, had his attention directed to the Gospel, and was converted. The next time the poachers were brought before the marquis he missed the smuggler, and asked what had become of him. The gamekeeper replied,—“My lord, he has become a missionary, and will never trouble us again.” His lordship then said,—“I wish all these young men were missionaries.”

“The same young man had been in the habit of illegally making malt, but when he embraced the gospel, he had no peace of mind till he informed the

Excise upon himself, and delivered to them all the malt which he had on hand."

A Highland Chieftain's reproof to a father.—
"Another young man in Breadalbane was brought to the knowledge of the truth. His father, who was an elder in the parish church, did what he could to get him to give up his connection with the sect that was everywhere spoken against, and return to the church. When he found that he could not prevail upon him to return, he applied to his laird, M'Nab of M'Nab, to see if he would try to prevail upon him. The old laird asked the father if the son was obedient to him. The father replied, that he was. 'Do you think,' said M'Nab, 'that there is any reformation on him for the better since he joined these men?' The father replied, 'I cannot say but there is.' 'Then, sir,' added the laird, 'why do you wish him to leave them? Poor block-head! it would be good for you that you were like him.'"

Thus, there were those who, although they did not embrace the religious opinions of the Missionaries, yet, seeing the change effected by the doctrines they taught, could not but admire a system which was evidently so beneficial to society.

Many more cases of a similar nature could be given, but these must suffice.

Mr. M'Killican, who studied at Mr. Ewing's first class, was sent to Breadalbane in 1801, and there helped forward the good work, and was also made the instrument of good to many. Some two years afterwards a few young men, who had studied at the

seminary in Edinburgh, were sent to itinerate in the counties of Argyle and Perth.

Mr. Campbell, after visiting these parts of the Highlands, and witnessing the good done by the preaching of the missionaries, said, "I would rather be the Christian who contributed a mite to spread the gospel of Jesus, than the man who built a pyramid, whose summit should touch the sun. Nor should I like to die with fifty guineas in my purse, without having appropriated, during my lifetime, a suitable part of my property for the sake of our Saviour's kingdom."

Numerous were the instances in which the missionaries were made prisoners, merely for preaching the gospel. Some of them were sent to jail, one of them not less than four times; and in two instances they were put on board of ships of war as impressed sailors, in the hope of ridding the country of them.

We give the particulars of three cases.

1. At the village of Whitehouse, in the year 1800, Messrs. Haldane and Campbell were sent to the sheriff of Argyle, 35 miles distant, under an escort of volunteers, as vagrant preachers. The sheriff finding no legal fault in them set them at liberty. They returned to the village from whence they had been taken, and, to the great mortification of the clergyman, who had caused them to be arrested, preached from Phil. i. 12, "The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;"—which actually was the case;—for when Mr. Campbell preached at the same place, some time afterwards, he found the sergeant,

who had commanded the party that guarded Mr. Haldane and him to the sheriff, *sitting* at his right hand, *a new man*,—and on his left hand sat the minister's man, also converted. This last was a singular case. It is related by Mr. Campbell as follows:—"When Mr. M'Allum first went to Whitehouse, the man was not allowed by his master to go to hear him preach; but one evening Mr. M'Allum preached in a barn adjoining the minister's stable, and only separated by an old gable. The man being in the stable when Mr. M'Allum was preaching, and observing a hole in the gable, he put his ear to it; the gospel passed through the hole to his ear, up to his understanding, and down to his heart, so he became a new man; and his soul not being able to live without food, he was obliged to attend the ministry of Mr. M'Allum, consequently he lost his situation at the manse."

2. In 1802, Mr. Farquharson, for preaching the gospel in Braemar, was sent a prisoner to the jail at Aberdeen. He was not many hours in the jail when a gentleman of the law waited upon him, and put a book into his hand, stating that a part of it was written in the very cell in which he was confined. "Read it," said the gentleman, "and you will soon be liberated," and immediately retired. Mr. Farquharson felt more desirous to know something about the contents of the book than to regain his liberty. To his no small surprise he found it to be "Rutherford's Letters." This led him to muse on the sufferings of the godly author, and he thought his own sufferings but light compared with his. Mr. Far-

quharson was soon released, in consequence of the representations of the gentleman referred to, who seems to have been better acquainted with the Toleration Act than Mr. Farquharson's persecutors.

3. But the most notorious instance of persecution, which happened to any preacher in the Highlands, was that of Mr. Donald M'Arthur; and as this case cannot fail to be interesting to all the friends, both of civil and religious liberty, we give the following account of the trial, as recorded in "*Buchanan's Reports of Certain Remarkable Cases, in the Court of Session,*" pp. 60—72.

"M'ARTHUR *versus* CAMPBELL.

"Mr. Donald M'Arthur, the pastor of a dissenting congregation at Port-Bannatyne, in the island of Bute, brought an action against John Campbell, Esq. of Southall, upon the ground that the latter gentleman, on the 20th of October, 1805, while Mr. M'Arthur was celebrating divine service in the midst of his congregation, had violently seized upon his person, forced him on board a vessel bound for Greenock, and having landed him a few miles from that place, had, after confining him in a small inn during the night, marched him along the road as a common felon, and delivered him to Captain Tatham, the regulating officer for that quarter, as a fit person to serve in his Majesty's navy. That officer, accordingly, as the pursuer further stated, sent him immediately on board the *Tourterelle* frigate, which speedily conveyed him out of the jurisdiction of the Scottish

Courts. After being detained for five weeks on board different ships of war, and suffering, as he alleged, every species of indignity and hardship, Mr. M'Arthur was discharged by express order of the Lords of the Admiralty, and furnished with a certificate that he was never again to be impressed into his Majesty's service.—The summons concluded against Mr. Campbell for £2,000 damages, with expenses.

“Mr. Campbell, in his pleadings before the Lord Ordinary, denied several of the most aggravating circumstances of the case. In particular he alleged, that the pursuer was in the practice of preaching immoral and seditious doctrines,—that he was a fit object of the impress, having been formerly employed in the herring fishery, and being consequently a seafaring man, and that under these circumstances, acting *bona fide* as a Justice of Peace, he conceived himself fully entitled to deliver him to Captain Tatham. The interlocutor of the Lord Ordinary, (Lord Meadowbank,) being entirely full upon these and every other point in the cause, we insert it at length for the satisfaction of our readers.

“ ‘Having advised this process, finds it is not now controverted on the part of the defender, at least not articulately denied, that the pursuer quitted the seafaring occupation in the year 1801, which he had formerly in some measure practised, as a curer and carrier of herrings; that he thereafter betook himself to preaching, exhorting, and solemnizing public worship as a Protestant dissenter from the Established church; that on the 29th August, 1804, he was ordained as a Baptist preaching elder, pastor, or

minister, by persons of that persuasion; that in the same year he became a pastor of a Baptist meeting at Port-Bannatyne, which possessed there a particular place of worship; that the fact of the pursuer's situation at Port-Bannatyne was well known to the people on the Argyleshire coast opposite, viz. at Collintraigh Ferry, and neighbourhood thereof, where the defender was resident; that on Sunday the 20th October, when peaceably celebrating public worship on the sea-shore, near that ferry, along with a number of persons assembled near him, the defender, without any previous requisition to the pursuer to desist from performing worship there, and without any warrant against the pursuer, proceeded, with assistance of others, to disturb and interrupt the worship of God, and seize violently on the person of the pursuer, and then carried him by sea to Greenock, delivering him into the hands of the officer regulating the impress there, to be impressed into his Majesty's navy; that he was thence carried to Ireland as a seaman, with such speed, that an interdict granted by Lord Bannatyne could not be served in time to prevent that measure; that an application in Ireland for a writ of *habeas corpus* was also defeated by the pursuer's being carried to the Downs; that when there, he was discharged by an order of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, of 27th November, 1805, who were pleased also to grant him a protection against impressment in time to come; that the defender does not allege that he was possessed of any press warrant when he used this violence against the pursuer, or that he had any

other motive for it, than that he disapproved of the pursuer's doctrines as being adverse to the lawfulness of war, except the allegation that he had been guilty of seditious speeches, though he declines to condescend as to such speeches, or the time or place of uttering them; and being of opinion that if the defender really believed that the pursuer's doctrines were adverse to the lawfulness of war, the oppression was the more grievous of getting him impressed into the navy to serve in war; and that the whole proceeding was highly scandalous and unjustifiable, and that it is aggravated by the attempts to justify it in this Court, and by the allegation that the Lords of the Admiralty must have been misled by the representations of fanatical sectaries when they gave the pursuer a discharge and protection; and also by the hurrying away a person dedicated, as he was, to religious functions, without communication with his wife and family of that event, without any investigation or form of law, and without affording an opportunity for the courts of justice to interpose in his behalf: Therefore, on the whole, repels the defences, whether founded on the pursuer's having once been a seafaring man, or on the religious doctrines he is said to have taught, or on the seditious speeches which it is stated that it was rumoured he uttered; and refuses the representation, and adheres; and further finds the pursuer entitled to £105 sterling, as a *solatium* for the wrong he suffered; together with indemnification of the expenses incurred by him, personal or otherwise, in obtaining his deliverance, and

expenses of process ; and ordains accounts thereof to be put in ; and decerns.*

“Mr. Campbell presented a petition against this interlocutor to the whole Court, to which answers were made by Mr. M'Arthur, and the cause was upon these pleadings advised on the 6th December by the Judges of the Second Division, who affirmed the judgment of the Lord Ordinary.”

Counsel for the pursuer, the Hon. Henry Erskine, Inglis and Robertson, W.S., Agents. Counsel for the defender, John Clerk, Esq., J. Campbell, W.S., Agent.

Lord Robertson, in giving his opinion on the case, said :—

“I am fully aware of the propriety of protecting inferior magistrates, in the fair exercise of their authority, and of discouraging actions of damages against them, founded upon alleged errors in judgment. But on the other hand, I never can forget, and I never shall forget while I sit here, that it is the duty of the Judges of the Supreme Court to protect the liberty of the subject. Therefore, wherever an action of damages is brought for any invasion of that liberty, it is incumbent on the magistrate to show that his conduct has been regular, and that if he has committed any error, it is merely an error in judgment, for which he is not liable. A good deal has been said about the nature of the pursuer's doctrines, but this I lay entirely out of the question ; whatever

* The Speech of the Lord Ordinary was exactly in conformity to his interlocutor.

they were they are of no consequence to this cause; for, *1st*, there was no complaint made to the defender as a Justice of the Peace on the subject; *2dly*, there is no evidence that he made any inquiry; *3dly*, he had no jurisdiction to take cognizance of any such offences; and, lastly, though he had, I never heard that to serve on board of a man-of-war is the proper punishment of heresy. It is said that the defender acted as a justice of the peace:—I rather think he acted as a constable. I cannot conceive upon what grounds he can allege that he acted as a justice of the peace. Has a justice of the peace any power to come without warrant, authority, proof or investigation of any kind, or any measures of a legal nature, and, *brevis manu*, to lay hold of a person and send him on board of a man-of-war?—I have no conception that such proceedings can be justified; and, therefore, I think the interlocutor substantially right.”

These extracts give a glimpse of a state of opinion, such as the present generation have no conception of from their own experience, and show that the missionaries were not treated with silent neglect, but experienced as much censure and opposition as the clergy and landed proprietors could manifest. Government, however, gave no interruption to their labours, but afforded them protection in the exercise of the rights of conscience. The issue of Mr. M'Arthur's case operated powerfully in making the enemies of the missionary cause refrain from open acts of persecution.

We must not dwell longer on the Highlands, although we should have liked to survey the opera-

tions of Congregationalists in other parts of the country besides Argyle and Perth shires. We return to our general account.

In the interval from 1798 to 1807 (nine years), eighty-five churches were formed, and had pastors ordained over them, in various parts of Scotland. Thus Congregationalism acquired a footing in our country in a much shorter time than could have been expected.

It is worthy of notice, that the influence of Congregationalists in those days was felt by many of the pious, both in and out of the Established Church. Evangelical ministers were stimulated to greater diligence in their ministerial labours, and employed new means to stir their people to Christian activity, so that the pious among them were provoked to love and good works. Thus Independency was the means, in no small measure, of infusing a more healthy and vigorous spirit into the older denominations of the country—the effects of which are still visible. The late Dr. Russell was of this opinion: he writes,—“By means of the movement which took place at this period (1798), there was awakened a spirit of greater zeal in various religious bodies,—a more pointed manner of preaching was adopted by many. There came to be more discrimination of character. The empty flourish of the instrument gave place to the well defined tones and melodies, which awaken all the sympathies of the soul. The unfettered freeness of the Gospel was more fully proclaimed, while its practical influence was more distinctly unfolded; and a beneficial influence was found to operate upon other

denominations.* And we have the authority of the Principal of Marischal college, Aberdeen, for saying, that Congregationalism helped to produce the late disruption of the Established Church; for we remember to have heard him say, at one of the Congregational Union meetings at Aberdeen, in April 1843, that, "The future historian of the Church will have to say that the Congregationalists have done much to bring about the present crisis in the Church of Scotland."

Missionary Churches.

In February 1803, the two churches in Edinburgh resolved to send missionaries to the heathen; and agreed to request the other churches to co-operate with them. One of their resolutions was,—“Whatever we do, will be in addition to what is already doing by others. We are persuaded our plan will not prevent any Society from sending out a single missionary. We have no idea of opposition. We will pray for all who, by proper means, endeavour to extend the Redeemer's kingdom. There is ample room for the exertions of all.” The plan suggested met with the cordial approbation of the sister churches. All who were willing to engage as missionaries were invited to come forward. In a short time seven young men offered themselves for the work, and were readily accepted, viz., Messrs. now Drs. Paterson and Henderson,—Messrs. M'Lae,

* *Memoir of Greville Ewing*, p. 814.

Dick, Reid, Balfour, and M'Queen. The first two were destined for India, and sailed from Leith, August 1805; but, by some mysterious arrangement of Providence, they were detained on the continent of Europe, where, for years, they were usefully employed in the cause of the Redeemer. In the same year Messrs. Dick and Reid sailed for Canada; Mr. M'Lae for the States of America; and, in 1806, Messrs. Balfour and M'Queen went to Nova Scotia.

In their outset, our churches were *thus* missionary in their character. Not only did they cause the Gospel to sound out from them, throughout all the regions round about, but they also sent itinerants to enlighten other dark parts of our land; and missionaries were sent to foreign parts. But this spirit was of short continuance. It was checked in 1807, from which time, till 1812, comparatively feeble were the exertions that were made to spread the Gospel at home; while anything done for foreign parts since 1807 has been done in connection with missionary societies.

Itinerancies.

The early itinerating exertions of Congregationalists in this country have been highly honourable to the churches. Their itinerants have zealously laboured in districts wide and desolate, barren and dreary. By the hedges and highways, in barns and kilns, in school-houses and halls, in dwelling-houses and chapels, they have preached the Gos-

pel to sinners; and it is hoped that the lapse of time will not lessen the importance of such work in the estimation of the body. In continuing such labours the churches are imitating the conduct of the primitive Christians, and acting in conformity to the example of Christ, who said to his disciples, "Let us go to the other cities and villages round about, and preach the gospel, for thereunto am I sent."

Until the year 1807 our churches were in as prosperous and comfortable a state as infant churches could possibly expect to be, notwithstanding that they had to struggle with every adverse wind and tide, that could blow or roll in opposition to their progress. The piety, zeal, love, and union, which then prevailed, are remembered by some with pleasurable feelings. Nevertheless there was, prior to the year 1807, a disposition to depend on man, in a manner and degree, that was due to God alone. This grieved the Holy Spirit. To a certain extent he withdrew his influences, and the churches were left "like the heath in the desert."

In 1807 these churches were placed in new and embarrassing circumstances. A withering blast came from the north, which was attended by direful consequences. We refer to the circulation of Ballantyne's "Treatise on the Elder's Office" among the churches, which was followed by other innovations. Controversy on church principles, rights and privileges, ran so high, that it needed all the wisdom, temper, and experience of our seniors to pilot the bark amidst the storm. The new order of things, recommended for the adoption of the churches, spread

rapidly among them. Bitter contentions, strife of words, jealousies, and divisions followed, of which none but such as passed through the painful scenes of those days can have an adequate idea. Inexperienced rashness adopted the new views. Anarchy prevailed in the churches, and in some cases a beautiful fabric became a shattered ruin. The pious of other bodies, who were inclined to favour our system, shrank with sorrow and alarm, from what appeared to them so disastrous an experiment of Congregational principles. Thus many stumbling-blocks were laid in the way, both of Christians and unbelievers.

The occurrences in question not only embarrassed and weakened the churches, but exposed them to the triumph and the sneers of adversaries, and brought an odium on every attempt to follow out true and Scriptural fellowship. Dr. Struthers, with his usual candour, says, "Though too many, no doubt, chuckled over this rupture, which in a great measure laid in ruins one of the noblest schemes, which modern times have witnessed, for diffusing religion and evangelizing the population of the country; yet the good and the liberal of all parties, who rejoiced in the spread of religion, grieved over it, and could have wished it had been obviated. It long continued to draw from their bosoms the sigh of regret."*

Many of the churches were poor; and if they had hitherto been unable to support their pastors, much less were they able now, that they were divided in

sentiment, fewer in number, and all foreign aid withdrawn from them. In consequence of these things, some of the pastors retired from the work. Some, who continued at their posts, betook themselves to teaching schools, whilst others continued to labour, managing, as they could, to subsist upon the slender support which their people could afford.

Considering the many privations which our ministers had then to endure, it is surprising that so many of them remained at their stations. Most of these faithful servants have finished their course, and have obtained their reward. Only nineteen remain—two of whom are incapacitated for preaching, the others labour as they are able—and all of them wait their Master's call.

During this critical juncture, there were in the churches some to whom God gave strong faith, firmness, fortitude, and patience. He was with them and blessed their exertions. Matters were gradually put right. All was overruled for good. The churches obtained rest, and again directed their attention to a perishing world.

The breaking up of the seminary cut off all supplies of preachers. To repair this loss, the Glasgow Theological Academy was formed in 1811: but a supply of preachers without the churches being assisted to support them, would not have removed the evil. Hence arose the Congregational Union in 1812, which has been so great a blessing.

At the close of fifty years, in the history of a people whose beginnings were small, and whose exertions were despised, we are disposed to say,—“What

hath God wrought!" And whilst we think of our fathers—of those who have entered into rest through their labours, of those who are following in the same course, and of the means which are still employed to extend and perpetuate the same work—let us ascribe all to Him, who is the head over all things to the church, and give the entire glory and praise to His infinite goodness,—never forgetting, that it is by the maintenance of Scriptural doctrine and discipline, by actively spreading the knowledge of salvation, and by adhering to the principles and spirit which actuated our fathers, that we can expect Scriptural prosperity. Ever may our prayer be:—Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee.

Now, unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

**Review and Contrast, Suggested by the
Jubilee of Scottish Congregationalists:**

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN NILE STREET CHAPEL, GLASGOW,

ON TUESDAY, OCTOBER 31st, 1848,

BY THE REV. A. W. KNOWLES,

LINLITHGOW.

REVIEW AND CONTRAST, ETC.

ECCLES. vii. 10.—“Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.”

WHEN we review the past, and compare it with the present, there is a propensity, according to our position or age, to run into opposite extremes, and come to conflicting conclusions. Some descry almost nothing to admire, nothing to covet, in the aspects of times gone by, and they are disposed to turn away from the repulsive review as suggestive merely of admonitory warning. Others are habitually inclined to idolize the past; to speak in high terms of commendation of the good old times; to represent ministers and people now as far inferior in talents and worth to those they loved and honoured in the days of their youth; and thus to deplore the changes witnessed as retrograde in character, and injurious to the best interests of the Church and the world. This propensity to suppose the former days were in every respect better than these, the language of the wise man, recorded in this portion of Scripture, was probably intended to check. It intimates that any enquiry into

the cause of the deplored change would be unwise, as the supposed retrograde alteration might exist only in the prejudiced imaginations of the discontented. To counteract the paralyzing apprehension here reprobated, to induce to cherish the opposite disposition by the adoption of a different estimation, and thus to elicit gratitude instead of complaint, and animate to persevering exertion in the good work of the Lord, it may be beneficial, and in harmony with the special object and exercises of this day, consecrated to the commemoration of the Jubilee of our denomination in our fatherland, 1st, To take a brief review of former days in their religious aspects; and 2dly, Essay to contrast those with the distinguishing characteristics of the present times.

It is proposed then, 1st, to take a brief review of former days in their religious aspects. From what position the survey ought to be made, by what time and country it should be circumscribed, we are reminded by the design of our present meeting. It is now, you are aware, fifty years last month since the first Congregational Church was constituted in Scotland on our distinctive principles. On the 9th of September, 1798, a religious society, in accordance with the order we deem scriptural, avowed their unity in the faith and their allegiance to the King of Zion, and were publicly recognised as a church of Christ in Aberdeen. That same year, several fathers and brethren, stimulated by ardent zeal to save souls from death, threw off the trammels of clerical domination, and travelled through the length and breadth of our land to proclaim free and full salvation to all

who heard the joyful sound, to preach peace by Jesus Christ. One beneficial result of their evangelical labours was, that churches of professedly converted souls were collected in various parts of the country. Thus it was in that year our denomination began to have a local habitation, and a recognised designation, in Scotland. It was fifty years ago. This is our Jubilee year, and we would keep it with fervent gratitude, with self-abasing praise. As an appropriate part of the exercises connected with such a festival, it has been regarded as calculated to be useful to have a succinct account of the state of religion in Scotland about the period when Congregationalism, according to our practice, was exhibited in this country. This is the department assigned to me, for the proper performance of which I pretend not to be fully competent, and must throw myself on the forbearance and candour of Christian friends and fellow labourers. I feel it is a difficult subject, yet I would endeavour to discuss it faithfully. I am aware it is delicate ground on which to tread; I would essay to walk over it humbly, charitably, and fearlessly. While I must honestly speak out, and denounce whatever was reprehensible, wherever found, I would not willingly give unnecessary offence to any lover of our common Lord. I would "set down naught in malice," would nothing exaggerate, but give a plain unvarnished report of evils, which we must sincerely deplore. Nor would I say a word to foster a disposition of self-laudation among ourselves, to cherish a spirit of self-righteous boasting, "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we," and all beyond

our pale is the court of the Gentiles. We should ever bear in mind, by the grace of God our fathers were what they were, we are what we are. With these becoming dispositions let us enter on the proposed moral survey.

When we review the spiritual condition of the Establishment about the specified period, the spectacle presented by manifold trustworthy accounts,—not a few written by attached adherents of the system,—the scenes and facts, which the aged may recall to remembrance, divulge a state of matters to the enlightened mind inexpressibly painful, unspeakably lamentable. From many a pulpit there was heard no gospel such as Paul preached; there came no proclamation of salvation to sinners, as such, through the blood of the sin-atonement Lamb. The deceived hearers were directed to build their everlasting hopes on refuges of lies. So completely was the Saviour kept out of view, that his accepted sacrifice was seldom presented even to the dying. I remember a memorable example of such disastrous neglect. I once met with an office-bearer in an extensive parish, a decent and respectable man, the only person in a populous district who visited and prayed with the sick and the dying. He told me he had come from the bedside of one who was apparently on the verge of eternity, but who was in a composed and very happy frame of mind. I asked him “was she relying for divine forgiveness and acceptance on the finished work of Jesus Christ?” His reply astounded me. “We never trouble the dying with such mysterious matters.” One single startling fact like this may im-

press, when general assertion and vague declamation may fall unheeded. Nor, as those who had an opportunity of becoming extensively acquainted with men and things in our land about the beginning of the previous half century, or later, can testify, was the case to which I have alluded at all uncommon. When such were the unscriptural sentiments of their trusted spiritual guides, what must have been the spiritual condition of the people? If this was no singular occurrence near the metropolis, how deep must have been the moral darkness which enveloped the extremities of the land? Even on the pulpits of the metropolis the blight of moderatism had fallen with a benumbing influence. There were some chapels of ease where the gospel was preached plainly and faithfully, to which the starving people flocked in crowds, but elsewhere with few exceptions "the trumpet gave no certain sound." Indeed it was the avowed system of civic rulers in those days sedulously to exclude all evangelical ministers, deemed wild men, from the pulpits of the churches under their control. With the exclusion, many who were attached to the Establishment were greatly dissatisfied, and sighed for a change. I well remember when a decidedly evangelical minister was appointed to one of the city churches in Edinburgh,—what a loud burst of congratulation and gladness this elicited; it was spoken of in certain religious circles as a special privilege, a singular mercy. There were parishes in the north where what was called the Lord's Supper was not observed for a series of years. There were others, not far distant, where the celebration of their

sacraments attracted crowds as to a fair, for diversion, if not for dissipation. There were scenes witnessed on such occasions, assuredly anything but calculated to awaken serious thought, to benefit and bless immortal souls. Thus as the great and good Dr. Chalmers, while yet in the Establishment, truly announced and candidly acknowledged, the whole ecclesiastical parochial system may be in extensive operation, there may be the church and the school, the clergyman and the teacher, and yet spiritual desolation prevail, and moral death reign undisturbed. Alas! too appropriate was the charge to many parts of our country fifty years ago. Yet all was not unmingled darkness, all was not unbroken sterility; there were even then favoured spots, where godly ministers in the Establishment preached Christ crucified with great fidelity and considerable success. But such instances were comparatively rare, and formed marked exceptions.

There was, however, a more efficiently counter-acting influence then in operation. The God of providence and grace had, in much mercy to our country, prepared instruments to check the disastrous deluge of formalism and pharisaism, to roll back the advancing tide of heathenism and immorality, by the repeated secession of godly ministers and conscientious people from the corrupt and tyrannical Establishment. Unquestionably the various bodies of Seceders proved a great blessing to Scotland in many respects. They especially preserved and extended the knowledge of the doctrines of free grace, where otherwise they would have been forgotten and unknown; and

eternity doubtless will discover they were countenanced and honoured by the Head of the church universal, to turn many from darkness to light, to obtain an inheritance among the sanctified through faith in Christ Jesus. When travelling on business connected with the objects of our Union, I have repeatedly observed, in sequestered dales and obscure hamlets, a modest unadorned building, which I was informed was a Secession meeting-house; and a thrill of delight was experienced by the reflection, there has been for years a blissful light shining in a dark place; there the adorable Immanuel has been recommended in his superlative attractions; and there, we may confidently hope, souls have been born to God, and put in the way of well-doing for eternity. Yet, at the period to which we would turn a retrospective glance, there were in the ministrations, and doings, and divisions of those bodies of professing Christians serious obstacles to their efficient usefulness. There was a propensity to preach nothing but doctrines, and those doctrines perhaps associated with unscriptural additions of the most repulsive and heart-hardening tendency. There was a propensity with some, we would not aver with all, to exhibit almost habitually a cold frigid system of orthodoxy, with few faithful pointed appeals to the conscience. There were not general and impartial efforts to separate the precious from the vile. There was a baneful want of discrimination both in preaching and prayers: the whole congregation were either represented and addressed as all saints, or all unsaved. The late Mr. Cowie of Huntly, an intelligent and zealous minister of Christ,

who knew the denomination with which he was then connected well, published a pamphlet about fifty years ago, in which he affectingly bewailed the mode of preaching too common among his brethren, which he declared was calculated to lull the unconverted asleep in indifference, by telling them they must wait God's time, thus weakening the conviction of personal responsibility; or which tended to drive serious inquirers to despair. He complained that many sermons he had heard were adapted to foster a spirit of sectarian bigotry, of supercilious scorn of others, of reliance on privileges. I must here in fairness add, in our days I have heard discourses from ministers of the United Presbyterian body, exhibiting salvation by Christ as freely, and fully, and faithfully as could be desired.

It is thus a melancholy verdict that must be pronounced upon an impartial review of the religious aspects of this country, about the period when the efforts of Congregationalists were brought to bear on the minds of the religious and irreligious. Lest it may be supposed that verdict is too partial and severe, permit me to corroborate it by the testimony of better qualified judges. I quote the language of our venerated brother and father, the late Dr. Russell, whose departure to his rest above, on our account, we must sincerely lament. Alluding to the time when Mr. Ewing had begun his abundant and beneficial labours in the Master's vineyard, he has given this explicit testimony:—"Genuine Christians had long lamented the decay of vital religion in the land. In place of scriptural truth, cold disquisi-

tions were delivered, which spoke neither to the hopes, nor fears, nor affections; so that the church, in many instances, became the dormitory of the parish. In various ways there was a systematic perversion of the Gospel of Christ, by reiterated statements of a character altogether self-righteous. The true ground of hope to a sinner was never brought forward,—or if any reference was made to it, the object was to hold it up to ridicule and scorn. The doctrine of salvation through faith in the atoning work of Christ was reproached as hostile to morality, and this too often by men whose own immoralities were foul and flagrant. Religion, where any attention was paid to it, became cold and speculative; but in many quarters it was altogether disregarded, for the people had sunk into a listless indifference, and a torpid apathy. Had it not been that the different bodies of evangelical dissenters kept alive the knowledge of the gospel, in certain districts of the country it must, to all human appearance, have been extinct. It ought not to be concealed, however, that even among those who were called evangelical ministers, both in and out of the Establishment, there were not a few whose manner of preaching could not be said to amount to all implied in beseeching and entreating. While there was a correct exhibition of orthodox doctrines, there was little feeling on the part of the preacher, and little effect was produced on the minds of the hearers. And, as may be supposed, there was a great deal of empty formality, even where what is called evangelical doctrine was heard. The truths of the gospel were not brought home to the conscience, as they

ought ever to be. There was a pertinacious adherence to forms and prejudices, which fettered exertions in behalf of the many, who were living in a state of manifest irreligion." To this clear, and full, and trustworthy verdict, which will not be questioned by those who knew the estimable and candid writer, allow me to add a similar testimony, taken from the memoir of Mr. Watson, by Dr. Alexander:—"By Christians of almost all parties it is now admitted that the state of vital religion, at that time when the first Congregational Church was formed in Aberdeen, was in this country very low. The iron reign of moderatism in the Established Church had diffused over the length and breadth of the land, a cold, illusive, and profitless substitution of mere empty forms, for the life, and fervour, and substance of Christianity; whilst among the dissenting bodies, internal dissension upon matters of minor moment, coupled with a scrupulous adherence to established order, and a sensitive dread of anything like innovation or excitement, had prevented their influence upon the community from being so wholesome and spiritualizing as it might otherwise have been. A state of spiritual torpor had thus been allowed to creep over the public mind, which was favourable neither to a high degree of piety in believers themselves, nor to active efforts on their part to impress religious truth on the minds of others." Such was the deplorable condition of Scotland, in regard to true religion, about the close of the last century. Verily, those former days were not better than these!

It is of importance to bring those melancholy facts,

which cannot be disproved, before the attention of the rising generation especially, that they may be aware of the high and distinguishing privileges they enjoy in the present day. The saddening review may prove beneficial to all, as it is calculated to awaken fervent gratitude to the Author of all good for the auspicious change we have witnessed, and dispose to hail it as the precursor of still better times, of advancing conformity to primitive Christianity. To create and strengthen such salutary emotions, let us now,

2dly, Essay to contrast the religious aspects of the present times with those of former days. A blessed and blissful alteration respecting the momentous matters of eternity, respecting the only infallible rule of religious faith and practice,—how sinners can be saved, and how saved sinners should live,—a change concerning these paramount concerns of guilty immortals, has unquestionably been experienced and evinced in the sentiments and conduct of multitudes. Those amongst us who can look back for thirty, forty years or more, must perceive an observable and extensive change for the better in many respects. Among the principal instruments the God of all grace employed to effect this, we hesitate not to bring forward the names of Ewing and Aikman and the Haldanes. These respected brethren, with others like-minded, beheld with deep sympathy the spiritual condition of their countrymen, and were roused by the affecting contemplation to announce and spread the message of mercy. Their itinerant labours, and the effects which these pro-

duced, formed a new era in the religious history of our country, and ever will be so represented when that history is impartially written. Thereby a spirit of serious inquiry was awakened, the domination of clerical influence was weakened, the Bible became to be regarded by many as the authoritative and final standard of appeal in all religious matters. Thus men were stimulated to read and think for themselves; not a few were led to ask what shall we do to be saved? and were directed to the atoning cross for pardon, protection, and peace, and then induced to search the Scriptures for direction to become followers of the churches, which in Judea were in Christ Jesus. Hence religious societies, formed on what we regard the apostolic model, were collected in various parts of the land;—a change that, which we of course must contemplate with pleasure and praise! Nor has the influence of the diffusion of more scriptural principles been confined to those who are denominated Independents. We are persuaded it has told powerfully and benignantly on other bodies of professing Christians. At least, since that time, there has been a great increase of preaching, and preaching of a more efficient kind, more clearly exhibiting the divine method of salvation, with more pointed appeals to the conscience. There has been a vast augmentation of the means of grace, of diversified instrumentalities employed to pluck brands from the burning. Before that period there were no Sabbath schools; now there is one of those useful seminaries, those nurseries of the church, in connexion with almost every evangelical congre-

gation. Before that period there was no sermon on Lord's day evenings, unless on special occasions; now there are few, if any towns, where an opportunity is not there afforded of hearing the Word of life. Before that period there were no itinerancies, the thousands in sequestered and distant localities might complain "no man careth for our souls;" now we have annually heart-cheering reports of extensive itinerancies, undertaken by men of God to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ to those perishing for lack of knowledge. Are not these beneficial changes, which must gladden every lover of the Saviour and of souls, who believes God ordinarily works by wisely adapted means, and saves by enlightening? I might here also allude to Christian instruction societies, and the employment of city missionaries, which were then unknown; but what has been mentioned is amply sufficient to demonstrate the former days were not better than these. I would not expose myself to the charge of sectarian bigotry by asserting, had it not been for the existence of our denomination these benevolent efforts to save would never have been exerted. We would not evince any desire to monopolize the credit of these salutary alterations, by referring to their undoubted connection with the period when the principles we profess were openly avowed and practically embodied. I merely state the fact,—every one may draw what inference from it he pleases. But by us the review of the past in its comparison with the present should be especially employed in connexion with the diffusion and embodiment of Congregational principles,

and be applied to our own denomination. What then were we in Scotland fifty years ago? One small religious association, consisting of only nine individuals. What are we now? Brethren, look at the contrast, and let us survey it with unfeigned gratitude! There are now more than one hundred Congregational Churches in Scotland; there are several in all our large cities,—there is one in the great majority of country towns. The nine members have been increased to more than nine thousand! This is the doing of the Lord, and it is wondrous in our eyes; marvellous and exhilarating in our eyes especially, who have witnessed the small beginnings and the ample increase,—though not all we could wish, I will call it the ample increase. Surely such a contrast affords no reason for despondency, no cause for the complaint, we have wrought no deliverance in the earth; should it not rather constrain to thank God, take courage, and go forward? Well may the emotions of our veterans be this day similar to those of the patriarch Jacob when he was returning to the land of his birth, and looked back to the time when he travelled that road a solitary wanderer, and then surveyed his altered circumstances, his large family and possessions, and with humble gratitude to his Benefactor, and deep pathos, he exclaimed, “With my staff (nothing but my staff) I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.”

Yet more extensive good than their own organization and edification, have our churches been the instruments of effecting in the land of our nativity.

They were not satisfied with a good hope through grace of their own salvation from sin and wrath. Believing the souls of others were as precious as theirs; believing the Saviour of their own heart's confidence, was as able and willing to save many more, they laboured to bring moral wanderers to the Shepherd and Bishop of souls. They subscribed liberally, and employed tried and zealous brethren, to go to the highways and hedges, to the neglected portions of the country, to invite to Jesus, to proclaim, "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come to the water of life without money and without price." The saving results of those benevolent efforts, eternity alone can fully disclose; but we have good and sufficient grounds for the firm persuasion, there are hundreds, who have gone to the better land from the Highlands and islands, and many a sequestered spot, who, through the never ending progress of their immortal existence, shall bless the God of providence and grace, that these churches were collected, and disposed to send to them the heralds of salvation, by whom they were brought to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. Thus to endeavour to increase the happy number of the happy subjects of Messiah our Prince, is the genuine influence of converting grace, by whomsoever experienced. This is to resemble the matchless Friend of self-ruined sinners, who, prompted by disinterested beneficence, for our sakes became poor, and cheerfully gave his precious life for our ransom. And that he, who is concerned solely about his own soul's welfare,—that he who could be contented to go

to heaven alone,—that he who will do nothing, give nothing to bring fellow-men to the Saviour;—that he has known the Lord and tasted that he is gracious,—that he has the mind of Christ,—that he is in a safe condition, is very questionable indeed. On no such selfish principles were our churches constituted. Thus to extend the dominions, to spread the fame, of him they call Master and Lord, was one grand object for which believers were ordered to unite in the church fellowship; it was not solely to promote their own advancement in the divine life, but along with that to draw those who were without into the fold of God. The primitive churches knew this was their vocation, and faithfully, nobly did they fulfil it. So it is recorded in the Scriptures of truth, from them sounded out the word of the Lord unto the adjacent regions. Did not our Churches, from their commencement, manifest their deep practical conviction that this also was their imperative obligation? That they were fully aware of this, and were faithful to their trust; that their zeal to save was obvious and observed, was demonstrated by the name by which we were first known in the land—the honourable appellation of Missionaries. Not only the preachers, but the people,—not solely the pastor, but the members,—were, in many places, all designated the Missionaries. It is a name of which we were not ashamed, and which we fondly hope our successors never shall blush to hear applied to them. I have called it, for we deemed it, an honourable appellation; may our churches ever deserve, and glory, in the name of missionary churches! Such

has been the acknowledged, the realized vocation, especially of our societies located at the extremities of the country. They have been really missionary stations. Our Congregational Union is truly a Home Missionary Society. This, we should never forget, is one important purpose for which we have been united to Christ, and in the fellowship of the gospel. All Christian societies should be like lighthouses, erected on stormy rock-bound coasts, reared to give light, and save life. Let such be our object, our heart's desire and prayer, that He, who bought us with his blood, may form us individually and collectively for himself, that we may show forth his praise. Late circumstances may have partially changed our position from the aggressive to the defensive. Yet we must not be contented merely to maintain our ground; far less should we feel disposed, by any new obstacles, to beat a retreat. Forward is the Master's order, and forward be our rallying cry; forward be the legible motto on our banner, and forward be echoed from all our ranks. Every commanding motive, that ever could excite the ardent desire to enlarge our borders, remains in full force. Let us then rise to the height of our vocation, essay to do our part, welcome all legitimate assistance from all who love our common Lord, and never be satisfied, till Scotland, from the East to the West, from the North to the South, bow in cheerful submission to His sceptre, who rules his saints by love. Let us only be true to our principles and faithful to our peerless King, and we, or our successors, shall see better times than these.

The review we have briefly taken, and the contrast we have endeavoured to present, should awaken and keep alive fervent gratitude to the beneficent source of every good gift. The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Having obtained help from God, we continue unto this day. Here we raise our Ebenezer. For all we have been made by divine truth and grace,—for all we have been disposed and enabled to perform for the best interests of men and the glory of our Redeemer,—we would cordially and unreservedly ascribe the whole praise to God our Saviour, as we hope to do world without end.

Yet the retrospect should deeply humble before the Inspector of all our actions, and of every secret spring of action. Before Him must we not confess we have not been what we might have been; we have not done what we ought and could have done. Ah! what have we done for Him that died to save our guilty souls? The appeal of Emmanuel from the cross—‘This did I do for thee; what hast thou done for me?’—may well lay the most devoted, the most useful, low in the dust of self-abasement. Nor should we compare ourselves with others,—our own societies with other religious bodies,—to foster self-complacency, to excite self-gratulation; for we ought to be deeply conscious there are too many deficiencies amongst ourselves to furnish too good ground for the silencing appeal, “Are there not with you, even with you, things against the Lord?” No; we would not boast: we would rather remember, and

deprecate, our faults this day. We would turn to our most merciful Lord, and confess to him,

“Our prayers and deeds, defective and defiled,
Are but the feeble efforts of a child;
Cleansed in thine own all-purifying blood,
Forgive their evil, and accept their good.
We cast them at thy feet, our only plea
Is, what it was, dependence upon thee!”

Then the contrast between matters as they were and are, should encourage to cherish exhilarating anticipations of better days coming, inexpressibly more propitious for the church and the world. We prize our principles, because we believe they are conducive to that desirable consummation, because we are persuaded they are connected with the diffusion of primitive religion. We adhere to our church order, because we deem it a means to an important end,—the perfecting of the saints, and the consequent conversion of sinners to Christ. So let our younger brethren, preachers and people, regard the distinctive principles of Congregationalism, and hand them down unimpaired, uncompromised. The beneficent results, which we confidently anticipate, some of us may not see realized. The men of that generation, who have borne the burden and heat of the day, are wearing out,—are going home. Many standard-bearers, who commenced the reformation, have fallen in the high places of the field. Our fathers where are they? Those yet spared are feeling the wasting influence of prolonged labours, and must soon go hence. We look to the rising ministry, to the younger members, to maintain, and extend, the cause

we love. Most cordially do we pray, may they be better than their fathers,—more enlightened, more devoted, more diligent, more successful! We solemnly charge them to essay to be able to tell their successors, as we by grace can tell them, we leave the cause in a very different position, and with far more favourable prospects, than we found it. Then at length both he that soweth, and he that reapeth, shall rejoice together.

It may be there are some present, who have repeatedly heard the message of mercy delivered by ministers of our churches, and by other heralds of salvation, but who are still Christless, prayerless, unconverted. Have you heard our venerated father Mr. Ewing, who has gone to his reward? heard our beloved brother Dr. Wardlaw, mercifully spared with us? heard our younger brethren? heard them tell of your guilt and peril, proclaim a Saviour mighty and merciful to save you to the uttermost, and heard all unimpressed, unsaved? Then where are you? On the brink of perdition. For what are you recklessly preparing? “The servant who knew his Lord’s will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.” And wilt thou choose to meet the Almighty as thy foe? wilt thou, when he stoops to beseech you “be ye reconciled to God?” Jesus has done all; the supreme Lawgiver is satisfied; the Saviour is ready to receive you, full of mercy, full of power. “Be it known unto you, through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and all who believe in him shall be justified from all things.”

Finally, be we Christ's by our own voluntary surrender. On the finished and accepted work of Jesus build we our hopes for eternity. To Him who loved us, as none ever loved, let us consecrate our hearts, our lives, our all, and, when our time on earth shall terminate, we shall enjoy better days in the better land,—incomparably superior to all we have witnessed in this world of imperfection. There we hope again to associate with our beloved brethren who rest from their labours, and join the church of the first-born, composed of the spirits of just men made perfect. There we shall review the past with unceasing, untiring adoration of Him, who guided and guarded, blessed and made blessings, and brought to be near and like our redeeming God; and with all the saved eternally praise Him, who led his people through the wilderness to the city of habitation, for his mercy endureth for ever.

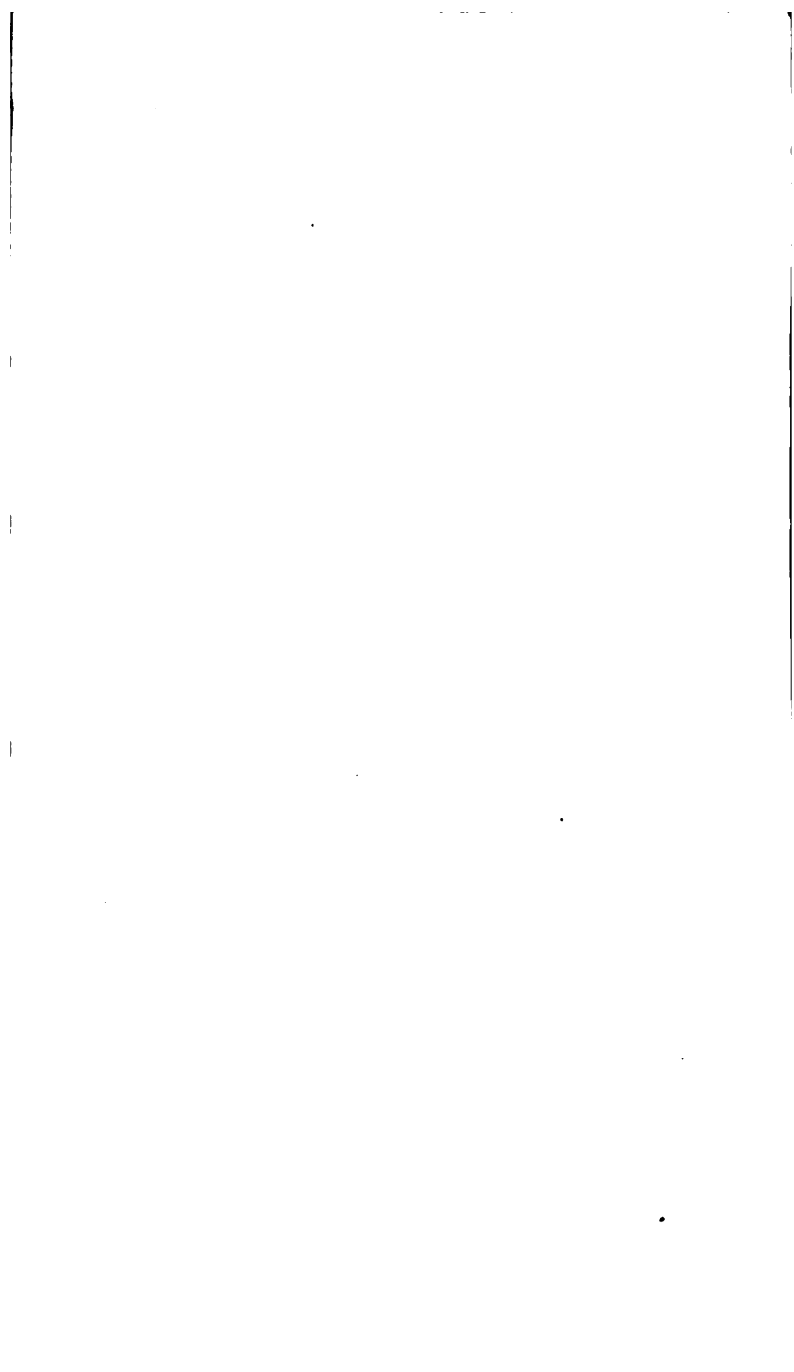
**The Work of the Churches and their
Means of Performing it :**

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN ALBANY STREET CHAPEL

ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26TH, 1848,

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THE
WORK OF THE CHURCHES, ETC.

ACTS ix. 6.—“Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

CHRISTIANITY in its subjective character as a religion actually embraced by men may be contemplated under two different aspects. Under the one it appears as a *condition* into which men pass; under the other it appears as a *life* which men exemplify. On receiving its truths men *become* something they were not before; and they *do* something they were not in the habit of doing before. Christianity gives its own peculiar complexion to a man's spiritual and moral being; and at the same time directs by its own peculiar working the man's outward walk and conversation. Whilst with one hand it opens up new sources of enjoyment to the individual who embraces it; with the other hand it sets before him new courses of action and new modes of service. The man's personal Christianity is at once his well-being and his well-doing. And though for the purposes of investigation these two aspects of his religion may be contemplated apart, in actual life they are never separated. In proportion as a man is enabled on good

grounds to say "*I am a Christian ;*" in that proportion is he constrained to add, "*and as a Christian I must act.*"

Men enter upon the condition of the Christian by the simple process of believing the truth as it is in Jesus; as soon as they credit God's testimony concerning his Son and embrace the offered mercy, they are introduced to the privileged estate of persons to whom there is no condemnation, and who have passed from death unto life. The unfolding of the Christian life, however, is a more lengthened process, and one for which thought and planning, enquiry and reflection, purpose and exertion, are required. We have to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," and we have "to work the work of God" with patience and under the guidance of an enlightened judgment. Hence whilst we have no need to put the question "What must I do to be saved?" we must ever be solicitously putting the question "What must I, as a sinner saved by grace, do to carry forward the work of God and to evince my gratitude to Him whose grace has saved me?"

Now in order to answer this question we must not call in the aid of mere human wisdom and knowledge; as if Christian action consisted simply in our doing what to each of us may appear best according to his own judgment. He who has called us to act, is He also to whom we must look for instruction as to what it behoves us to do. So it was with Paul in the case before us. Changed in the spirit of his mind, awakened to a sense of his former errors, feeling himself apprehended by a powerful yet gracious hand, and

knowing that henceforward his life must be one of active exertion to serve God; his first enquiry was, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" And so it ever is with the truly pious and enlightened mind. The believer's strongest desire is to please God, and knowing that God alone can infallibly teach what is well pleasing in his sight, such an one betakes himself to the Book of God and to the footstool of divine grace, and his sincere and ardent prayer there is, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" What is thus true of Christians individually is no less true of Christian churches. They too have not only privileges to enjoy but a life to develop,—a work to do; and for them also the supreme enquiry must ever be what their exalted Lord and Lawgiver would have them to do. To such an enquiry we, as a denomination, seem to be especially called at the present crisis. One of those great divisions of time by which the existence of public institutions is measured has been passed through by us. We stand at a point where we may with advantage collect the lessons of the past that we may the better prepare for the exigencies and the duties of the future. We are seeking this day to call up our slumbering energies, to revive our drooping efforts, to reanimate our flagging zeal, that we may the better accomplish the work which the Lord has given us to do. Though our tribe be one of the least amongst the thousands of Israel in these lands, we would nevertheless stand in our lot, and not be found wanting in any duty to which the Master may call us. Above all things we are solicitous to enjoy the happiness of those who know their

Lord's will and do it. On such an occasion, therefore, it may not be unsuitable that the preacher should attempt to place before you a sketch of the work which lies upon you, and to remind you along with that of what capacity and fitness you may possess for the doing of it. He may thus succeed in at once animating you to the faithful discharge of duty and vindicating for you a right to exist as a separate denomination, by showing that whilst you have all the fitness that other bodies have for doing the Lord's work, there are some things for which you possess advantages of adaptation such as no other body enjoys.

I. Of the work which lies before you much belongs to you in common with other religious denominations. You have your share in the common work of the Church of Christ on earth. You have to seek the conversion of sinners to him at home and abroad. You have to attend to the interests of the young, especially those who have been baptized in your churches, by providing for their instruction in both secular and sacred lore. "The poor ye have with you," placed under your special care by your Lord and Master, and commended to your sympathy and succour by the great Proprietor of all. The growth of believers "in grace and in knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" is a duty for which you have to provide. You have to seek the general well-being of the Church of God of which you form a part. And you have to bear your share in the responsibility attaching to all religious bodies as witnesses for Christ in the midst of an ignorant and gainsaying world.

These duties you have in common with all other religious denominations. They are theirs as much as yours, but they are yours no less than theirs; and therefore I would remind you that there remaineth here a vast work to be overtaken. Look at the world at large, and see how it still "lieth in the wicked one." Over vast tracts and territories an almost unbroken darkness reigns, beneath which the people sit pining and perishing. Even within our own country, highly favoured, much enlightened as it is, what moral wastes, what abysses of evil stretch and yawn on every side of us! Myriads of our countrymen are yet living without God and without hope in the world. Multitudes belonging to the same community, speaking the same tongue, breathing the same air with ourselves are hurrying along to an eternity of darkness and of woe. Children by thousands are pouring through the mysterious portals of existence, bringing with them cravings which earth and sensualism can never satisfy, for whose mental and moral training no adequate provision is yet made. Want, infirmity, decay, after filling our hospitals, our almshouses, and our workhouses, are continually leaving a huge residuum for private benevolence to overtake. And when we extend our glance so as to take in that portion of the globe which has, in the Providence of God, been brought under the sway of the British sceptre, what an accumulated mass of work presents itself as demanding the special thought and effort of British Christians! Has the fact been ever duly pondered by us that the British empire embraces at this moment *one-fifth* of the entire population of the

globe?—that it includes in it the most free, the wealthiest, and the most enterprising peoples of Europe; the largest territory held by any one power in America; the most hopeful and improving of the tribes of Africa; the most famous and refined nations of Asia; and nearly the entire of European dominion in the South Seas? Are you aware that this proud heritage of empire has an awful parallel in the unequalled amount of error, superstition, and idolatry that exists under the British sceptre? Has the startling fact ever been presented to you that at this moment our sovereign reigns over more Roman Catholics than the Pope;* over more Mahommedans than the Sublime Porte; over more Pagans than the whole continent of Africa; that there are in her dominions more Mahommedans than Christians, including both Catholics and Protestants; and more Pagans than Mahommedans and Christians together? and that consequently were the question, What is the religion of the British Empire? to be answered simply by reference to the religion of the majority of its subjects, the reply must be PAGANISM?† These are startling facts, and they ought to rouse us to a humbling sense of how much yet remains to be done within our own dominions in the discharge of that duty which God hath especially laid at the door of the Church in these lands.

* This was delivered before the recent abdication of the Pope; at present the statement is without force.

† See Arthur's *Extent and Moral Statistics of the British Empire*. London, 1848. An exceedingly valuable little work.

And then let us look at what *the Church herself* demands at the hand of her members. Of that portion of the body of Christ with which we stand identified the wants are ever urgent and ever growing. Of the Church at large, the peace, the strength, the honour, and the prosperity, are every day becoming more exigent of the concern of every individual believer and of every Christian community. Our relation to general society is becoming continually more difficult in its duties and more solemn in its responsibilities. The Church has long since ceased to be the one source of intelligence, the one centre of moral influence in the community. The light which emanated first from her is now reflected from many other points, and the consequence is a frequent crossing of lights, which is apt to dazzle and perplex. Mind, first awakened by her call, is now in many instances rising up against her, or asserting an independence of her guidance. It is even pretended in some quarters that she has outlived her day, that her work is done, and that the emancipation of the race must henceforward be committed to other powers. An estimate of man loftier than she is supposed to sanction is proclaimed; a morality more ascetic in some points, more lenient in others, than that which she unfolds, is in vogue; an ideal of fraternity and community more dazzling and poetical than that which she sets up is drawing to its illusive shows the gaze of multitudes. The masses are in danger of being seduced into the belief that a later and a better gospel than hers has come into the world. A supicion that she is becoming effete and inefficient seems spreading

even among earnest and in some sense thoughtful men. An idea has gone forth that she has even forgotten how to interpret her own oracles, and it is confidently asserted that she no longer adapts herself to the circumstances, and wants, and aspirations of man. Part of her own professed adherents are smitten with this delusion, and are seen in some cases calling in the aid of carnal philosophy to supplement her lessons, and in other cases providing themselves with what aid there may be in the spells and charms of a shadowy ritual. An impression seems to have laid hold of the minds of many, including some of the more commanding spirits of the day, that there is more hope for man in the school than in the church, from the press than from the pulpit, through the newspaper than through the sermon. The prevalence of such notions and impressions imposes upon the Church no easy task. It is difficult for her in such times to maintain her own place and yet not transgress her proper limits,—to allow to other powers and elements of influence their due importance and yet not suffer her own to be trenched upon,—to stand by her ancient landmarks and yet acknowledge the pretensions of every real occupant of the domain of thought, every genuine explorer of the territory of truth,—to do steadfastly and earnestly her own work without either refusing such aid as other powers can bring, or purchasing that aid by any unworthy compromise.

A mere glance at the work thus lying before the Church of Christ in these realms may suffice to convince us that there indeed "remaineth very much

land to be possessed by her," and that a necessity is laid upon her to "go up and possess" that yet unconquered territory, if she would not be bereft of the fruits of all her previous struggles. But is she competent to this? Is she adequately furnished for such a campaign? Can she with any show of prudence adventure herself upon so difficult and so hazardous an enterprise?

These questions throw us upon the consideration of the *means* which the Church of Christ has for the maintenance of her own interests, the discharge of her proper duties, and the extension of her sacred cause. I shall attempt briefly to recapitulate these, and keeping in view the *denominational character* of our present assembly I shall set myself to show how these are possessed by *us*.

And *first*; we rest upon the foundation of Christ and his apostles. We are built upon that stone which God hath laid in Zion. We lean upon the pillar which upholds the universe. We draw our strength from the treasure-house of God. We are marshalled under the banner of One to whom God has given the world as his rightful inheritance and his blood-bought property. We follow the dictates of men in whom the Holy Ghost dwelt and spoke. We have Christ and his apostles with us, not as venerable recollections, but as present and even living powers; not through the medium of vicars and successors—which we scorn as an idle figment, a scandalous delusion—but in their own proper agency, and as they ever have been with the church from the first until now. For, brethren, it was never

the mere *person* of Christ in human nature—the mere tabernacle in which Deity stooped to be enshrined, that formed the church's bulwark and foundation; it is Christ dying for man's sins and rising for man's justification and reigning for man's redemption, to whom the Church has ever looked as the pillar of her strength; and this the Church has now as much as ever; and more of this than she now has the Church could not obtain were Jesus to return in person to dwell upon our earth. So is it with our possession of the Apostles: we have them now as much as the Church ever had. The *men*, it is true, are gone; but it was never on the men as such that the Church was built. As men, Peter, James, and Paul were of no more advantage to the Church than are pastors and teachers of equal piety and talents in any age of her existence. It was as Apostles—as teachers of divine truth, and legislators in Christ's church, that they performed a peculiar and fundamental service to that church. Now in this respect they still live and are present with us, speaking every day to us from the page of inspired Scripture. All that was apostolic and inspired in them has been preserved; all that was merely personal and human has "gone the way of all flesh." The men have gone, the Apostles remain. The "earthen vessels" in which God was pleased to place the divine treasure have been long since broken in pieces, but the treasure that was in them remains as precious and as entire as ever. Of us, therefore, no less than of the primitive Church, is it true that we are "built upon the foundation of

apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." And in this is our strength.

2. We have available for our use the necessary spiritual gifts which Christ conferred upon his church. Such endowments are essential to the prosperity and success of the Church of Christ. With such objects as she has in view and such difficulties as she has to encounter, it is indispensable that something more than mere human resources should be within her reach, and that she should be "endowed with power from on high."

Now Christ, on taking his seat upon his throne, redeemed his promise to his Church by sending down his Spirit to be in them and to abide with them. The presence of the divine Spirit in the primitive Church manifested itself partly by miraculous gifts and partly by spiritual effects. Of these the latter are still enjoyed by the Church through the operation of the Spirit; that divine Agent is still abiding with us and still working amongst us; opening the hearts of men, that they may attend to the truths of God, enlightening darkened understandings and cleansing polluted consciences, working in believers all the good pleasure of Jehovah's goodness and the work of faith with power, and thereby giving a pledge and a security alike of the stability, the felicity, and the progress of the Church. With respect to the former it is otherwise; they no longer exist in actual exhibition amongst the churches. Let us not, however, hastily conclude from this that these miraculous gifts are nothing to us, or regret, as some seem to do, that the Church is now deprived of a privilege

which at one time she so largely enjoyed. I believe there is no such deprivation. I believe that the gifts of the primitive age, so far as they were advantages to the Church as a church, are still ours, and serve as useful a purpose now as they did in the days when they were exhibited. For consider in what it was that the real advantage of these to the Church lay. Take, for instance, the gift of healing:—was the entire value of that gift expended in the conveying of health to a few sufferers with whom the parties possessing the gift might chance to meet? Or take the gift of tongues:—without doubt this was designed to facilitate the propagation of the gospel, by enabling its preachers to address foreigners in their own tongue; but was this its only or even its primary use? I answer these questions in the negative; and I do so on the following grounds:—1. It is remarkable in reading the New Testament to find how little these gifts seem to have been exercised for the purpose of securing to the Church the benefits *directly* and *primarily* flowing from them. In spite of the gift of healing, disease and death seem to have prevailed in the early churches no less than now. Notwithstanding the gift of the discerning of spirits, false teachers were continually and everywhere creeping in amongst them. Though “to some was given the word of wisdom and to some the word of knowledge,” what ignorance and folly do we not find to have prevailed in many of these churches? Of the gift of tongues only two cases are expressly mentioned of its use, and in one of these (that which occurred on the day of Pentecost) it was *unnecessary*

so far as the understanding of what the speaker said was concerned (for there can be little doubt but that the Jews to whom the apostles then spoke were all able to understand one common language); and in the other case,—that in the church of Corinth,—it was not only unnecessary, but was so used as to lead to results *improper and injurious*. What, then, is the fair conclusion from these facts? Is it not this, that as these gifts were bestowed for the good of the Church, and as it was not from their direct exercise that the Church was to any great extent advantaged, there must have been some indirect or collateral result flowing from them, in which their chief value to the cause of Christianity consisted? And that this was indeed the case will appear manifest when we consider, 2dly, what our Lord and the Apostle Paul expressly state as to the use of certain of these gifts. The words of our Lord to which I refer are those which he employed in sending forth his apostles when, after commanding them to preach the gospel to every creature, he added, “And these *signs* shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”* Here our Lord announces the character which these gifts were to possess; they were to be *signs*, i.e. evidences of the divine presence with those who possessed them; and accordingly the Evangelist

* Mark xvi. 17, 18.

adds, that when the apostles "went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word by means of [δία] the signs which followed." It thus appears that when these miraculous gifts were first promised and conferred, it was that they might serve as signs of Christ's presence with and approval of his Church upon earth. It was in this light also that the Apostle Paul viewed and valued them; at least such as were not directly serviceable to the spiritual illumination of the believers. Speaking of the gift of tongues, he says expressly, that "tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not."* In the immediate context of this verse he is censuring the abuse of the gift of tongues in the Corinthian church; and in the preceding verse he intimates that, by following the practice of using unknown tongues in the Church, they were voluntarily reducing themselves to a condition which in the Old Testament is set forth as one of punishment. He then goes on to remind them that this gift was valuable chiefly as a *sign*, and that the parties for whose benefit it was in this respect adapted were not believers, but unbelievers. But *of what* was it a sign? Clearly of the great fact, that God was with his Church, and that he was now speaking to men everywhere and in every tongue. Hence, in accordance with this, we find Peter, on the day of Pentecost, telling the multitudes who had beheld with wonder the first exhibition of this sign, that its great use to

* 1 Cor. xiv. 22.

them lay in the evidence thereby afforded, "that the great and notable day of the Lord had already come," that the economy of particularism and partiality had passed away, and that God, no longer confining his revelation to the Hebrew people or the Hebrew tongue, was speaking to all nations—so that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.* So it was with this gift of tongues, and so, we take it, was it as a general rule with the gifts exercised in the primitive churches. Their great use was to give evidence of the divine authority of Christianity, to shut the mouths of gainsayers, to refute the cavils of sceptics, and to confirm the faith of believers, by showing that beyond all doubt or question this new religion had the presence and the protection of God upon its side. Now this end is for all times and for all countries. This truth once established, can never in any after time suffer any diminution of certainty. Let the wisdom of this world advance or retrograde,—let the human mind enlarge its sphere of vision or contract it,—let social circumstances fluctuate as they may,—let statesmen and philosophers, and philosophic or sentimental philanthropists scheme or cavil or dream as they please: it still abides an *unalterable fact*, that God has come forth to set upon his Church the insignia of his presence and the stamp of his authority. Of this heritage nothing can deprive us. It is a cherished treasure of which no power can rob us, and the value of which shall never be diminish-

* Acts ii. 16, 21.

ed. And amid the questionings of a restless and speculative age, we may go steadily forward in our appointed warfare, holding it up as "the banner which the Lord hath given to them that fear him, that it may be displayed because of the truth."

3. We have a sufficient and a suitable apparatus for maintaining the vitality and calling forth the energies of the people of Christ.

We have *officers* whose business it is to attend upon this very thing, and who are chosen to their office by the suffrage of the Church. We have *ordinances* with the express design of feeding and strengthening the flock of Christ. We have *an organization and order*, intended to secure the healthful and harmonious working of the united brethren. And in respect of all these, we adhere as closely as we can to the model set before us in the statute-book of Christ, whom we follow as our only head and lawgiver in religious matters.

As a visible Church has interests partly of a temporal and partly of a spiritual character, the officers administering its affairs require to consist of two classes—one for each of these departments. Hence, following the order of the New Testament, we have the deacon for the management of the temporal concerns of the Church, and the pastor for the conduct of those which are spiritual. A man fitted for the former of these offices, is a man characterized by an humble, kind, and conciliatory disposition,—a man accustomed to business and skilled in the management of affairs,—a man of mingled prudence and generosity, who neither allows his feelings to outrun

his judgment nor his judgment to cramp and chill his feelings,—a man of an open, cheerful, happy temperament, who can ask money from those who should give it, and bestow it upon those who need it with a frank sincerity and a good grace,—a man who has earned for himself the confidence of the Church by his knowledge, his piety, and his discretion,—a man, in short, to whom the rich will commit with perfect confidence the money they contribute for the carrying on of the cause, and who, in entering the abodes of poverty or sorrow as the almoner of the Church, comes like some ministering angel to do good, not more by what he gives, than by the way in which he gives it. A man fitted for the latter of these offices is one qualified to teach and to rule in the Church of God,—one well endowed with natural fitness for his work, and duly trained for its duties,—one whose heart is filled with love to God and to goodness and to the souls of men,—one who is deeply versed in the doctrines of Scripture, and expert in expounding the statements of Scripture to others,—one who has an earnest purpose in him, a just conception of how that purpose is to be attained, and a firm resolution to seek that purpose whatever may impede,—one too who is well versed in Christian law, not a stranger to the peculiarities of Christian temperament, himself of a cool, clear, and searching intellect, with much knowledge of human nature in all its phases,—a man firm and yet gentle, decided and yet forbearing, and in whose mouth authority wears the guise of affection, and reproof borrows force from tenderness.

That any one man combining in himself all the qualifications thus specified, either for the diaconal or the pastoral office, will be found either in our churches or in any other, is not to be hoped for in the present imperfect state; but experience has shown us that men *approximating* to such excellence may be found, and the theory of our polity supposes that, in selecting men to these offices, our churches will prayerfully and earnestly endeavour to secure such only as possess them in sufficient measure to give hopeful promise that, through their administration of affairs, the interests of the society will be promoted.

On the subject of ordinances and order I shall not dwell farther than to say that these exist amongst us according to apostolic injunction, and may be attended to by us so as to secure the continual vigour, purity, and activity of our churches.

What, then, is there wanting in our apparatus which either the Great Head of the church has appointed, or experience has shown the necessities of the church to require? If teaching be needed, we have it; if rule, we have it; if temporal management, we have it; if nourishment or quickening, we have it; if mutual watchfulness or help, we have it. Our furniture is complete for the edifying and strengthening of the body of Christ. If we fail in this respect, it is not from want of machinery; it must be from want of spirit and energy to use our machinery aright and make full proof of its powers.

4. and *in fine*;— We have abundant provision for the extension of the gospel among those who are

still ignorant of it. We have this not only in the public services of the sanctuary, but in that facility which belongs to our system of calling forth the energies of private members of the church, and employing them systematically in the propagation of the truth. Congregationalism has an aspect not only towards the church's internal well-being, but also towards its external operation. It belongs to the theory of that system that every member should be at work, not only for the peace and purity of the body, but also for the diffusion of the truth it maintains throughout the community. It is provided for in our constitution, not only that the word of the Lord should dwell richly within, but also that it should sound out from us to all around. Each of our churches, if it understand its position and vocation, will be a *missionary church*—a centre of light and blessing to the neighbourhood. It will fix upon a locality adequate to its resources, and if outward influences do not interfere, it will pledge itself to the Church at large to cultivate that locality for Christ. It will allow no talent it possesses to lie unused—no light the Master has given it to be hid. It will summon forth teachers for the young, visitors for the sick, Scripture readers, tract distributors, and fire-side exhorters for the ignorant adults, almoners for the poor, and in short leave no man who has power in him to do anything for Christ to rest in peace until he arise and do it. For this the materials are ready to our hand, and in the peculiar constitution of our churches we have singular facilities for working these materials to the full.

In what, then, I ask again, are we deficient? What part of the Church's allotted work is there for which we are not furnished? Is there anything essential to the successful accomplishment of those great ends for which the Church exists in which we are lacking, or in which we are behind the very chiefest of the churches? Are there not some things in which our advantages are superior to most? Away, then, with all indolent contentment, with all paralyzing doubt and misgiving. Let us gird ourselves for the work which lies before us, mighty and difficult though it be. Let us harness ourselves for the field, and advance with the step of conquerors. And when the Lord asks of us as a proof of fidelity to him to do what he enjoins, let us arise as one man, and go forward determined not to pause or falter until the *whole* is done.

II. In the observations which I have hitherto been making, I have confined myself to those duties which lie upon us in common with other sections of the Church, and to the furniture which we have for the efficient discharge of these duties. There still remains an interesting field of inquiry in those duties which belong to us specially and peculiarly as a denomination, and the provision which we have for the performance of these. Into this field, however, I can only hastily glance, your time not suffering any attempt at a more lengthened survey.

There are here two departments of inquiry,—the one relating to denominational support, the other to denominational influence. Under the former of these, we might consider the duty of supporting *denomina-*

tional institutions—such as our Academy, our Missionary Societies, our Union, and other such institutions which have risen up amongst us; the duty of supporting our *denominational literature*—such as those periodicals, large and small, which now come forth, or may yet come forth, under our auspices, and advocate our cause—the English Congregational Lecture, with which we no less than our brethren in the South are identified—and in general whatever attempts are creditably made from the press to maintain the ancient reputation of a body which has given to England the most valuable portion of its theological literature; for Owen was an Independent, and so were Goodwin and Howe, and Mead and Milton, and Doddridge and Watts, and many besides whose names occupy a foremost place in the annals of British theological learning; and the duty of supporting our *denominational Ministry*—by providing for the sufficient compensation of all the servants of our institutions, and for the raising of the stipends of all our pastors to a fixed minimum below which none shall be allowed to fall. All these appear to me to be objects of vast importance, and demanding the serious and persevering attention of all our brethren. At present, however, I content myself with barely mentioning them.

As respects our denominational influence, I have in my eye certain great ecclesiastical problems which I think it is for the interest of the church of Christ to have satisfactorily solved; and the solution of which by a practical process seems to have fallen especially to us. These problems are chiefly the

following:—1. How to combine purity with catholicity in the fellowship of the Church; 2. How to secure the liberty of each member of a church without the infringement of due order and subordination to appointed rule in the society; and, 3. How to preserve the independence of the churches, and yet secure the united action of the body. The importance of these problems no thinking man will question; all bodies of Christians admit it; but by all except our own the attempt to solve them has been practically relinquished. To us, therefore, this work belongs as our special duty; it is the lot which has fallen peculiarly to us; and it behoves us to see to it that we faithfully and skilfully discharge the work to which we are thus called.

Suffer a few remarks upon each of these topics.

1. By *purity* in church fellowship is intended the exclusion from the society of the saints in the church of all foreign, uncongenial, and hostile elements—the confining of the fellowship to those who give real evidence of being truly the people of Christ. By *catholicity* in church fellowship is meant the opening of the membership of the church to all who do afford such evidence, whatever be their infirmities of judgment, or errors of opinion on matters not affecting their real Christianity. Now, in some ecclesiastical bodies, neither of these exists; for the test of *character* which they apply is so lax that it admits multitudes who do no honour to the Christian name, whilst the test of *opinion* which they apply is so minute and precise that it shuts out multitudes of the very sincerest of Christ's disciples.

By other bodies a zeal for purity has led to narrow and bigotted limitations of the Christian fraternity; whilst others again, in the desire for catholicity, have thrown down the barriers which ought ever to fence the church, and have gone nigh to destroy Christian fellowship altogether, in their very desire to make it universal. To Congregationalism belongs the honour of having aimed at the avoidance of these errors, and upon us lies the duty of working out the problem which has thus fallen into our hands—that so we may be able to show to the church and the world that it is possible without endamaging or endangering the purity of the church to open the doors of its fellowship to “all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth.”

2. A Christian man is God's freeman, and he should have in the church scope for the free and legitimate exercise of that liberty wherewith Christ has made him free. But in our present imperfect state there is a danger of this being abused; liberty may degenerate into licentiousness; and may even be used “as a cloak for maliciousness.” When this is the case, the peace, the harmony, and the welfare of the church are at an end. God is the author of order and not of confusion. Christ will not permit his own institutions to be set aside or the rule he has appointed in the church to be despised with impunity. The Holy Spirit will not descend upon an assembly that is torn by strife, or pervade an atmosphere which is filled with the smoke and the dust of debate. Hence most ecclesiastical bodies have shrunk from permitting liberty of thought and

action to the people in the management of their affairs; and in their zeal for order and for office, have gone well nigh in many cases to tyranny, and in others to the deceiving of the people with a form of liberty without the power. Now in our churches it is not so. With us the power of the people is real and all-pervading. The principle on which our churches are founded is, that he who is the freed-man of the Lord is not to become the slave or the tool of any man,—that men of adult age, enlightened by God's word and regenerated by God's Spirit, are entitled to the management of their spiritual as well as of their temporal affairs,—and that it is a wrong to the individual, and an injury to the cause, when any Christian man is excluded from his due share in the conduct of the business of that religious society of which he is a member. But whilst we have thus liberty, we have also order. We have authority and rule, law and administration in our churches. We can repress the impertinent, confute the gainsayer, dismiss the heretic, put down discussion and debate, and “if any man seemeth to be contentious,” we can tell him that “we have no such custom, nor the churches of God.” It is true that our machinery requires a cool head and a firm hand to manage it; but this is only an evidence in its favour; for the very genius and design of Christianity may lead us to expect that it is only by such machinery that its heavenly results are to be secured. At any rate this is the machinery we have undertaken to work, and we stand before the Church pledged to show that it *may* be worked successfully, and that the liberties

of the Christian people may be preserved without the advantages of order or the just dignity of office being impaired.

3. The independence of the churches, as separate bodies, must be held by us as a first and sacred principle—a principle sanctioned by the apostles in the churches which they planted, pleaded for by our illustrious ancestors in this country, and proved by experience to be eminently conducive to the prosperity of the churches. But the united action of these independent societies,—the incorporation of these separate bodies into one, is an object also deeply important and interesting; and this problem also we have undertaken to work out. Other bodies pronounce it insoluble; by all of them there has been either a sacrifice of independence to unity, or of unity to independence. At one time our own body seemed in danger of pursuing the latter course; but of late years we have arrived at other convictions, and have boldly set ourselves to attempt the solution of what other bodies have relinquished in despair. Now, it is not to be denied that our difficulties here are very great; for our principle of the independency of the churches precludes us from the use of any of those schemes of confederation on which other Christian bodies are combined. An external and superior power, having right to interfere with the internal management of our churches, it is of course impossible for us to bear. A creed which shall not only set forth for the *information* of others what we profess, but which shall serve as a *standard* by which authoritatively to determine the

status of churches and pastors, is alike incompatible with our principles; for as every creed so used is to be regarded as expressing the mind of the party imposing it, it is obvious that the party on which it is thus imposed forfeits, so far as this transaction is concerned, all spiritual independence. Shut out by our principles from these ordinary modes of securing denominational unity, we have been thrown upon the strength of our *internal social feeling*, and have aimed rather at a practical solution of the problem than at one capable of nice theoretical discrimination and proof. In other words, leaning upon the assurance which mutual confidence inspires, we have sought rather to show by our deeds that we *are* one, than to attempt the construction of any formal organization of union;—our trust has rather been in the attractive affinities of our common faith and love, than in the mechanical compression of any outward organization. Holding the same great principles of religious truth, following the same formula of ecclesiastical order, and animated by the same great hopes and desires, there has risen amongst us, as it were spontaneously and without our devising anything in the matter, a natural *esprit du corps*—an irresistible denominational feeling, which of itself tends most powerfully to secure unity of action throughout our churches; and upon this rather than upon statutory rules and theoretical constitutions have we been content to rest the stability of our corporate association. This has been our aim, and in this we have succeeded. It may not be very easy to state in strict terms how our unity is secured; but this we know

that we are united; we *feel* we are one, and we *show* we are one by our works. Free from every controlling power from without—subject to no authority but that of Christ—without written creed or confession—destitute of all outward denominational organization—we are, nevertheless, at this moment, as united in doctrine, in practice, and in co-operation, as any of the ecclesiastical corporations around us, and than some of them much more so. Our pastors all preach substantially the same truths; our churches all observe the same usages, and practise the same discipline; and when any object of denominational interest is presented to us, we all move as by one common impulse. We have even been able to give our unity an outward manifestation—something approaching to a tangible organization, in our Congregational Union. Our aim there is to bring our separate energies into one focus, and without trenching upon the independency of our churches to confederate them together, so as to make them work in unison, and for great common ends connected with our denomination. In this aim we have succeeded to a most gratifying extent, and with God's blessing upon us we may succeed yet farther. It were unjust, then, for any to charge us with having sacrificed unity to independence; and it is absurd to maintain the insolubility of a problem of which we present the solution, in a practical form at least, to the eyes of the world.

Whether it be not possible to do more than this—whether our principles do not admit of our forming a still more systematic development of our

ecclesiastical unity—whether there be not certain principles tacitly admitted and acted upon by us, which need only to be openly and systematically followed out to give complete and manifest coherence to our churches:—are points on which I will not here enter, partly because the time is too far gone to admit of my doing any justice to the subject, but principally because I am anxious at present to dwell rather upon what we have actually done, than to speculate upon what it may be possible for us yet to accomplish.

And now it is needful that this discourse should come to a close. Suffer me to finish it with one or two fraternal exhortations founded on what has been already said. And

1. *Let us see that we fully understand and appreciate the work we have to do.* Let us neither underestimate its greatness nor overrate its difficulties. Let us take large and comprehensive views of the field which we are called to till—of the land we are called to conquer. Let neither the goodness of some of our habitations seduce us on the one hand into indolence, nor on the other let the toils of the warfare to which in other quarters we may be called excite in us impatience or dismay. Let nothing content us short of the *whole* land which the Lord our God hath given us; and let us never relax our efforts nor pause in our endeavours until our work is done, or the Master himself bid us cease from our labours.

2. *Let us take good heed to our implements and our apparatus.* Let us see that our furniture is com-

plete—that it is of the proper temper and material—and that it is in good order for our work. Let us beware of losing any part of our equipment; or of allowing any cunning foe or misguided ally to filch from us the least portion of it; or of being persuaded to barter any of our tried and trusty weapons for some new invention or some glittering toy.

Brethren, let us *look to our Bibles and take heed that they be not mutilated or tampered with*. Let us give no ear to those who raise doubts, insinuate difficulties, and excite scepticism as to this or the other part of Holy Scripture—men who under the guise of a spurious candour, and in alliance with a captious half-learning, meddle with the integrity of God's word, and, safe perhaps in their incognito, "hint at a fault and hesitate dislike"—men who having learned the uncouth spells of some foreign speech, raise ghosts which they cannot lay, and awaken tempests which they are impotent to calm. Let us have none of this among us. If we lose our reverence for the Bible as God's word to man, our cause and our character are alike gone.

Brethren, let us *look to our theology*. We have long been famous for a theology pure, scriptural and solid—removed alike from the monstrosities of Antinomianism on the one hand and the levity and laxity of Pelagianism on the other. Let us continue to hold this fast as essential to our stability, our reputation and our success. Let no "wind of doctrine," blow from what quarter it may, move us from the truth which we have received to hold—from that sound model of doctrine, which authorized

by Scripture has been handed down to us "by tradition from our fathers." It is a sacred heritage—not perhaps in all respects perfect, yet in substance worthy of being preserved and defended, if need be, with our lives. Long may the pure stream flow among our churches, unpolluted by the crudities of hasty speculation and unpoisoned by the corruptions of a vain philosophy!

Brethren, let us *look to our pulpits*. They are our tower of strength and our main support—the bulwark and the ornament of our cause. However certain other religious bodies may affect to despise the pulpit, we cannot, we must not think lightly of it. It is by it we have hitherto chiefly advanced, it is to it we are indebted for our main hold upon the public mind, it is by it our future triumphs must be fought for and won. The annals of the Non-conformist pulpit will form no mean chapter in the history of that great instrument which, though it may appear to man foolish and weak, is God's chosen mean for converting the world. Long may the character of our pulpit be upheld by the purity of its doctrine, the power of its eloquence and the excellence of its results! Long may it continue to proclaim as fixed and fundamental truths, redemption through the blood of the cross, and sanctification through the agency of the Spirit! May the day never come when it shall sink into a chair of philosophy, where the inanities of gentile ethics or the dreams of a transcendental philosophy shall usurp the place of the plain, homely, heavenly doctrine of "Christ and him crucified." Oh that that voice

which has recently been lifted up by one of our most honoured pastors in the South in behalf of an "Earnest Ministry," may not be uttered in vain, but that as aforetime it has been heard by the awakened sinner in his perplexities and by the afflicted saint in his trials, so now it may be heard in these high places of the field, arousing many true soldiers of Christ to put on their strength, to quit them like men, and valiant for the truth, to gird themselves for the work which the Lord would have them to do.

3. *In fine*, brethren, let us *have faith in our cause*. Let us not despise the day of small things, nor be impatient for speedy results. Let us have confidence in God's great law of a gradual and germinant fulfilment of his purposes. Let us be willing "to plant the olive for the coming age." Let us sow in hope. Let us labour in faith. Let us be Gideon's men who will go down to the camp of Midian, even in the dark, and with nothing to trust to but our old battle cry, the Sword of the Lord and of Gideon. It may be that the principles we hold may be long of securing that reception to which their truth and practical utility entitle them; but let us rest assured that in as far as they are true and useful, in so far as they are certain ultimately to prevail. Only let us be true and steadfast and thoroughly in earnest; neither on the one hand carrying our peculiar views to a wild extreme, nor on the other treating them as if they were of no importance; and through the Divine blessing our principles in due season will triumph over prejudice, and beat down opposition,

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and so diffuse themselves over the spiritual territory that there shall remain no more land to be possessed.

Then draw we nearer day by day,
Each to his brethren, all to God ;
Let the world take us as she may,
We must not change our road.
Not wondering, though in grief, to find
The Church's foe still keep her mind ;
But fix'd to hold Love's banner fast,
And by Obedience win at last.

KEBLE.

**A Paper read at a Conference of Members
of Congregational Churches,**

ON THE

POSITION AND PROSPECTS

OF

CONGREGATIONALISM IN SCOTLAND.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM SWAN.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following paper, as stated in the opening paragraph, was prepared simply for the purpose of being read at a meeting composed of none but members of Congregational churches. It was therefore considered by the writer as of a private and confidential character ; and there was, on his part, not the most distant idea of it ever being made public. It was first read at a conference of church members at Aberdeen, then at a similar meeting at Edinburgh, and lastly at one in Glasgow. At all of these meetings a desire was expressed that the paper should be printed and circulated among our churches, either separately, or as forming part of a volume to be published in connexion with our Jubilee services, and as a record of them.

This statement the author hopes will be received as accounting for the somewhat sectarian tone, which perhaps may be detected in his pages, when examined by those who were not contemplated by him as *listeners* to his paper, and were never thought of as to be one day *readers* of it. To the *candid* readers of the class now alluded to, no apology is needed for the manner in which he has referred to other denominations ; and to the *un-candid*, none he could offer would be satisfactory. He

might indeed have modified some parts of the paper, and brought it nearer to what it might have been, had it been prepared originally for the public eye; but he deemed it more becoming and honourable to give it as read, with only some slight verbal corrections, and with the addition of two or three unimportant paragraphs, which, for the sake of brevity, were omitted in the reading at the conference.

W. S.

POSITION AND PROSPECTS, ETC.

THIS meeting being composed of members of our churches, and the purpose for which we have met being to take a calm and candid view of our position with its duties and dangers, our communications must be considered as entirely *confidential*,—not that we have any secrets to hide from the public, but that our statement of facts, our inferences from them, and the expression of opinion about our own affairs, may be free and without restraint.

I might have wished that the task imposed upon me had been assigned to another, but I am willing to offer my humble quota to the proceedings of this interesting occasion ; and I bespeak the indulgence of my brethren while I lay before them some thoughts on the subject you have heard announced. I would only further premise that this paper is not submitted for the *adoption* of this meeting, but simply as presenting statements for its consideration, and as suggesting topics for brotherly conference. Any facts I may adduce will stand for what they are worth ; my remarks upon them are open to examination or correction. I feel assured that you will give me

credit for at least a good intention, and a spirit of affection to the churches, and zeal for their welfare. I have only further to premise that the nature of my subject, being strictly of a denominational character, requires me, in adverting to other Christian bodies, to speak of them as having separate interests, and as holding an ecclesiastical position not altogether in harmony with ours. I hope, however, I shall be enabled to do this in a spirit free from bigotry or uncharitableness. I hold that the staunchest independency is perfectly compatible with the truest Christian catholicity. Adherence to our distinctive principles is a virtual disapproval of other principles. We cannot consistently hold that we are right, in matters wherein others do not agree with us, without wishing that they were right also. At the same time we rejoice to acknowledge that the grand essentials in which our brethren of other evangelical denominations and ourselves are agreed far outweigh the minor points in which they and we differ. Those great verities ought to have a stronger *uniting* influence than the questions about less weighty matters have in disuniting us. Meanwhile we cannot refuse to others the privilege we claim for ourselves of calling no man Master—yielding undivided and unreserved obedience to Christ alone.

What I have now to bring before my brethren may be comprised under the following heads:—

1st, Some brief statistical notices of our denomination ;

2d, Some observations explanatory of the facts adduced ;

3d, Some practical deductions from them.

The first is *retrospective*; the second is *reflective*; the third is *suggestive*.

There is then something in regard to our churches for us to be *acquainted with*,—something to *think about*,—and something to *do*.

I shall not however adhere strictly to the division now announced, but may find it more conducive to the design of this paper to blend the statement of facts and circumstances with reflections they call forth and suggestions that arise out of them, instead of reserving these to be formally stated at the close.

I. Our position as a denomination at the end of fifty years from the first planting of our churches in Scotland is, that we number nearly one hundred churches, comprising a membership of between eight and nine thousand. Of these churches, about *forty-five*, or nearly one-half, require and receive aid from the Congregational Union, to enable them to support their pastors, and to meet other expenses connected with the maintenance of gospel ordinances. The churches that entirely support their own pastors, and also contribute to aid their poorer brethren, contain about *six thousand* members; the membership of the *aided* churches not amounting to three thousand.

During these fifty years our numerical increase has not been by a regular progression, for during the first years of our history, churches multiplied rapidly, and the accessions to the churches so planted were frequent. Twenty-five years ago the churches were about eighty in number, and some of these consisted *then* of as many members as they do at this day.

Of the churches on the list *twenty-five* years ago, five have ceased to belong to the denomination, and ten have ceased to exist, or have dwindled down to a few members without pastor or religious fellowship as churches.

From this it follows that a greater number of new churches have sprung up within the last twenty years than the difference between the numbers in existence then, and actually in existence now would indicate; that is, while the present number of churches exceeds the number at the period referred to by about *twenty*, there have been at least forty new churches formed within the last twenty years. *Five* other churches have been formed within that period, but have ceased to be reckoned with our churches, having connected themselves with another body.

The movement which issued in the formation of many of our first churches was of a missionary character. The preachers went forth as *Evangelists*—to preach the gospel. Many were converted under their ministry, and, with others who had adopted Congregational principles, formed themselves into churches. Pastors and deacons were chosen and set apart to their respective offices, and other things awaiting were set in order.

Many interesting facts, for review and comparison between the past and the present, here press upon our attention. But we select only one topic from many.

A comparison between the permanence of the pastoral relation at that early period of our history with

more modern times brings out some instructive results.

Of all the ministers *at present* (1848) in the field, there are twenty-two who were engaged in the work of the ministry in and previous to the year 1822, and all of these, with two exceptions, are labouring in the same spheres they then occupied. These, then, belong to a generation of pastors not given to change. The same may be said of upwards of twenty of our more aged brethren, who have finished their course since the date now mentioned, and who—almost without exception—died at the post they had occupied through a lengthened and honourable ministry.*

Within the twelve years from 1822 to 1834, there were forty ordinations of pastors among our churches. Of these ministers *nine* are dead; *four* have left the denomination; *four* have removed to England, or other countries; and only *eight* remain at this day in the places they first occupied as pastors. The remaining *fifteen* have either changed their sphere of ministerial labour, or left the ministry for some other calling. There was therefore *less* of permanency in the pastoral engagements formed within this period.

* It is affecting that since the first rough sketch of this paper was drawn up, only two or three weeks ago, death has deranged the calculations then made. Of the *twenty-two* ministers then alive who had been in the field previous to 1822, two have departed—Dr. Russell and Mr. Hill of Huntly. We cannot now linger over these striking events, nor pay the tribute due to their memory; but we cannot but pursue these inquiries with a solemn and chastened feeling, perceiving that death is thinning our ranks even while we are writing their numbers.

Within the next twelve years, i. e. between 1834 and 1846, there were 103 ordinations. Of these ministers (not 103 in number, some of them having been ordained twice, and some having made even more changes) *five* are dead; *eight* have left the denomination; *sixteen* have gone to England, two to Canada, and one to India; *three* have given up the ministry; *thirty* have removed from one church to another; *six* of these have removed twice, and only *twenty-five* remain in the places where they were first set apart to the pastoral office; and of these, *six* have been ordained within the last two years. So that, setting aside the ordinations of brethren during 1847, we have more ministers who occupy their original pastoral charges to which they were ordained in 1822 and previously, and have consequently been 26 years or more in the ministry, than we have of pastors who have remained without a change since 1834.

The last twelve or fifteen years therefore have witnessed a very marked increase of changes in the connexions formed between pastors and people. Of all that have been formed within that period, only about *one-fifth* part have continued to this day. The other four-fifths have been characterized by change. In many cases the connexion subsisted only for a year or two.

N.B.—Of the 33 ordinations that occurred between the beginning of 1843 and the end of 1846 the connexion between pastor and people has been already dissolved in the case of *nineteen*; only *twelve* remaining unbroken of the engagements formed between five and six years ago.

It is not our purpose to enter upon a discussion of the causes that have operated in producing effects so striking. To do so properly would far exceed the limits of this paper. Suffice it to say, that we blame neither the pastors nor the churches altogether; but are disposed to ascribe these shortlived connexions (at least in many instances) to causes which neither pastors nor churches could wholly control. Perhaps vacant churches were sometimes too hasty and inconsiderate in calling to the pastoral office men who were not suited to them and to the locality. Perhaps sometimes a preacher, impatient to have a settled charge, listened to a call from a people with whom he could not expect to remain long. The zeal and activity of other religious bodies, also, in many cases, circumscribed the field of a pastor's usefulness, occasioning disappointment on his part, and dissatisfaction on the part of his people, which soon resulted in his seeking a new sphere, and they a new minister.

Although unwilling to judge severely, and I am sure more disposed to sympathise with suffering brethren than to blame them, I think there may have been in some cases an *impatience* under difficulties, leading to an early separation between pastor and people much to be regretted. I am the more persuaded of this, because I know several most exemplary instances of the opposite character—of brethren who struggled for years under opposition and discouragement, but happily weathered the storm, and live and labour still where they once severely suffered,—

honoured and useful and happy among a united and attached people.

On the other hand, cases have been in which it was clearly the fault of the churches that their pastors left them. Neglecting to provide for his wants, and otherwise regardless of his comfort, not valuing his ministry nor profiting by it, refusing to aid him in his plans of usefulness, or to support him in his trying and arduous work, a church has shown so entire a want of sympathy and of affection, that, to continue, would have been to make a sacrifice of all comfort and self-respect, and without any prospect of usefulness. This made the duty to remove *painfully* clear. These frequent changes have operated most injuriously upon the churches, marring their comfort,—weakening their influence,—giving an aspect of unsettledness and uncertainty to their character, and deterring reflecting persons from joining their communion.

If we examine the statistics above given in their bearing upon the means necessary for providing a supply of properly qualified teachers, they seem to point to the following conclusions:—

1st. That the churches ought to use means to draw forth and encourage young brethren of promising talents to give themselves to the ministry. Not a few of this class whose deep piety, humble devotedness, and gifts of a high order, might have been turned to good account, have been allowed to enter upon secular pursuits; and so their energies have been in a great degree lost to the Christian cause; for, estimable and exemplary as they may be in a pri-

vate sphere, they exercise *there* but a fraction of the influence they might have exerted had they been devoted to the Lord's work in the ministry of the gospel.

2d. That the churches, if wise for themselves, in years to come will sustain more adequately than they have hitherto done the Glasgow Theological Academy. They will see that their *maintaining* the position they at present occupy will be in a great measure dependent, under God, upon their being furnished with devoted, able, and well-trained ministers of the gospel, in sufficient numbers, and with sufficient variety of taste and talent to suit the diversified wants of churches in city, town, and village,—in the Lowlands, the Highlands, and the Islands.

3d. That the education of young men for the ministry ought to be conducted with a most assiduous and anxious aim to *prepare* them for the actual work of the Lord as *pastors* of *churches*. They must be well instructed in all that relates to the management and ruling of a church, as well as to public teaching from the pulpit. They ought to be versed in all that relates to conducting cases of discipline,—removing differences, and promoting love, harmony, and confidence among the members. To the *want* of these qualifications on the part of some young pastors may be traced their so soon resigning the oversight of churches that solemnly chose them to the pastoral office. Their stay was so brief, and perhaps so unpleasant while it lasted, mainly because they were so unfurnished with the knowledge requisite to conduct the discipline of the church.

4th. That there should be a more adequate provision made for the decent maintenance of the pastor. He must live suitably to his station, and if he has a family, his income must be such as to enable him to bring up and educate his family creditably and well.

On looking over the list of removals, we observe that not a few of our best men have gone to England, and thereby their services have been lost to the churches that stand so much in need of all the force we can muster and maintain. The well known reason why some of these brethren left their useful spheres of labour in Scotland was just this, that the people did not contribute a sufficiency for the support of their families, and there were not resources from any other quarter to supply the deficiency; or at any rate aid was not sought.

The actual income of many of our pastors is inadequate to their support, in a way becoming their office and station. Some of them, though single men, find it scarcely possible to subsist; and they are only constrained to continue from year to year, with a people who keep them at the starving point, because—bad as their condition is—they know not how to change it for a better. The committee of the Congregational Union have never refused aid to a deserving case, as far as their funds allowed; but it is a delicate matter for them to proffer aid where it is not asked, and might not be welcomed.

5th. That the novel and anomalous fact brought out by these statistics, of a considerable number of pastors having left the connexion, must have had a

weakening and disturbing effect upon the churches they left, and partly accounts for the little advance we have made in numbers and efficiency of late years. But the fact now referred to is to be viewed in the light of an *effect*, as well as the cause of other effects. The pastors and preachers who left us are of two classes. *One* class adopted views of certain portions of divine truth at variance with the sentiments generally held by the churches. The consequence was their forming, with those who adhered to them, a separate body. The *other* class consists of pastors and preachers who have joined the Free Church or other presbyterian communions. We judge them not, but may be simply allowed to say that the secession of *these* individuals has very little weakened us; for, of all we have the honour to call brethren in the ministry, the loss of those who so left us could be the most easily borne; and scarcely could a smaller addition be made to the strength of our presbyterian neighbours by the defection of an equal number from our ranks.

It is far easier to exhibit the *numerical* statistics of the denomination, than to make a just *moral estimate* of the men and the churches in question.

On this I shall not venture, and yet it may be allowed to make a few remarks, which the impartial review of our history warrants and calls for.

1. It is not wise to vaunt of our earliest churches as all beauty and unity and perfection. Their history would disprove any such claim. Errors of sentiment and of practice could scarcely be avoided. Fervour without experience, and zeal without know-

ledge introduced modes of action, which maturer consideration and increasing light taught the churches to abandon. This gave an appearance of fickleness and propensity to change, which enemies held up in derision of these newfangled sectaries, that were "everything by turns, and nothing long." The churches themselves suffered from innovations and changes, even when the change might be from evil to good. Division ensued, and, with division, weakness. Some would cleave to an error or a defect because it had a place and a prescriptive right: and some preferred the innovation more because it was *new*, than because it was found worthy of being introduced and maintained.

2. Neither is it wise to praise the fathers and founders of independency in Scotland in the strain of *indiscriminate eulogy*. Many of them were men of eminent ability, of exemplary devotedness and zeal, of noble disinterestedness and courage, and were raised up by a gracious Providence as men for the time and for the work. But, without detracting an atom from the merit that may be justly awarded to them, it is well to bear in mind that it was *their hold of God's truth that gave them the hold they took on the public mind*, and gave them the standing they occupied. It was the neglected, forgotten, downtrodden truth of God relating to the spirituality of his kingdom—the separation of the church from the world—the fellowship of his people—that drew around them the men that sighed for this fellowship, and rejoiced when they found it in churches formed on a pure and scriptural model.

Let it not be thought that the planting and rapid increase of our churches may be fairly ascribed to the zeal and talents of their founders. No; we give the men their due meed of praise, but we ascribe the glory to God, whose servants they were, and whose work they performed. It was not the men that made the *truth great*, but the *truth that made the men great*. We may well be proud of such men as Ewing and Wardlaw, and Orme and Russell, and others, both of the departed and the still surviving; but we glory rather in the *truth* they have been honoured to advocate—the principles they have maintained. I do not say the principles they have “honoured,” but *the principles that have honoured them*.*

When these principles are committed to our hands, may we be as faithful in upholding and transmitting them to those who come after us, as *they* have been from whom we received them!

Our duty is plainly this, to beware of resting on

* When the foregoing paragraph was penned, of the *four* names mentioned, two were still with us, and two had joined the Church above. But of these remaining two *one is not*. I had pleased myself with the hope that our honoured friend and father, Dr. Russell, would hear this paper read; and I knew that his noble heart would have responded most warmly to the sentiment now expressed. No one was farther than he from arrogating to himself the praise that belongs to God; and sure I am that *now*, could his perfected spirit communicate with us, it would, in harmony with the utterance now given, say—“Not unto *us*, O Lord, not unto *us*, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth’s sake!”

the merit of our fathers and founders, and rather seek to deserve for ourselves the praise of being worthy of such an ancestry. If the present and coming generations of Independents proceed not onwards in the same spirit of faith, love, and zeal the early leaders of the movement displayed, their deeds will but show more strikingly our degeneracy by the contrast.

The only way of shaping the future to our wish is to occupy the present in promoting the cause we desire should prosper. If our aim be, as we believe it is, in accordance with the Divine plan, we are assured our labour shall not be in vain. God's servants are sometimes honoured to bring about the most extensive changes, not by being the direct agents in producing them, but in influencing those who do.

Our fathers were men of their time; and God was pleased to make them useful, both directly and indirectly, in advancing the cause of truth. Let us be men of *our time*, and He who was with *them* will not forsake *us*.

3. Still less does it become us to boast of the working of Independency among us, as if the churches had uniformly displayed all the unity and love among themselves, and practical recommendation of their principles to others that was expected of them. The history of some individual churches may exhibit a closer adherence to the letter and spirit of the divine rule than others, but all have more or less deviated from it; and in some cases, a period of declension and of fitful effort to strengthen

the things that remained, has issued in the extinction of the church altogether.

4. In seeking to restore a drooping cause, there has been sometimes a more eager grasping at the help which the shining talents of a preacher might promise, than a united and humble looking to God for the blessing of his Spirit, and the return of those times of refreshing which come from his presence. We are prone, under a sense of weakness and poverty, to seek help from an arm of flesh, and need to keep clearly in view the real cause of our weakness and the real source of our strength. The numbers and influence of those who follow not with us, do not affect the truth of our opinions. Scriptural church order is not a question to be decided by majorities, but by an appeal to the law and the testimony. The chief thing we have to be concerned about is, that our professed purity be supported by corresponding practice. If we do not condemn ourselves by inconsistency, we need not fear the arguments of those who differ from us, or the high tide of popular favour on which others are borne along.

Far be it from us to envy our friends who enjoy that popularity; and equally far from us any attempt to popularize our own churches by widening the door of admission to our fellowship. Much that is excellent and much that is improving in other communions, we observe with unfeigned satisfaction; and were this the proper place to do so, we could willingly enlarge on that theme. Suffice it to say, that if others are making progress and coming nearer

the Divine standard, it will not do for us to stand still or to retrograde.

5. These considerations bring before us the fact, that there is much in the internal state of our churches, as years roll on and changes pass over them, affecting their welfare quite irrespective of any influences from without. The worst foes of the Church have often been those within the camp. The attacks of enemies, the dislike, contempt and misrepresentation of the ill-affected might be generally very harmless, were the state of things *within* what it ought to be.

What is true of individual Christians is true of Christian societies, that unless they watch and pray, keep near to God, and walk in humility and fear, following holiness and striving against sin, they will soon exhibit the too plain evidence of having sunk down to the earthliness of character from which they had escaped. Let us beware then of self-confidence and presumption, turning our very advantages into occasions of sin, and increasing our spiritual dangers by the very privileges which, rightly improved, would have been our best preservative against them.

It is a trite observation, that some men are behind their age; some are up to their age; and some are in advance of their age.

The *first* are a kind of prophets, and generally very lugubrious ones. They prophesy only evil. They see nothing in the progress of events around them but the onward course of the world from bad to worse. The good of the past and of the present—

they prophesy—is about to be swept away by the spirit of innovation, in which they see nothing but evil.

The *second*—the men up to their age—are the active and enlightened spirits, seizing the time—understanding their position—meeting its claims—ready to part with what is old if it is not also proved *good*, but cautious of novelties till they are subjected to scrutiny.

The *third*—the men in advance of their age—are diviners—men of rare genius—few in number, and dwelling apart from the multitude. They see far, and know much, and judge intuitively; but can do little, because the time they live for is not yet come. We need the less regret that we belong not to this order, if we may but take our place in the second rank, *as men up to their age*, and ready to address ourselves intelligently and actively to present duty.*

Our position in relation to other denominations now demands a few words.

It is evident from the history of our churches that they have never been popular; and the present aspect of things around them gives no indication of their rising in public favour. This is a fact which

* "The office of the ministry will generally be found to include three classes: men behind their day, men before their day, and men of their day. Those behind their day are always preaching to those of a former age, are conscious of alarm at every onward movement, and feel as little sympathy with their times as their times feel with them."—DR. HARRIS.

cannot be concealed, and of which we have no reason to be ashamed. It is not merely our *congregational* form of church government, that has dared to lift up its head in "presbyterian Scotland," that has kept alive prejudice against us. Our principles of pure communion have gained us the reproach of presuming to invade the Divine prerogative of judging the heart.

We regard them — (I mean our presbyterian friends) — as not coming up to the scriptural line which ought to separate the church from the world. They accuse us of going beyond it. This charge is easily disproved; but there is *another* — a *practical* argument against us, we cannot always so successfully repel; namely — that while we *profess* so much purity of communion, and separation from the world, our fellowship is — after all — equally corrupt with that of the communities we condemn.

This accusation can be properly met only by an appeal to our actual practice as being consistent: — by an appeal to our discipline as strictly enforcing the laws of Christ, without partiality and without hypocrisy — removing from the church an unworthy member, as soon as it is proved he is so: — by an appeal to our weakness and poverty, as proving that we resist the temptation of receiving to membership those whose wealth or rank are their only recommendation.

If we cannot defend ourselves *thus*, we must submit to the humiliating charge of making false pretensions to purity, and of assuming to be better than others, without any real superiority.

The possibility of such inconsistency and presumption should lead every church to try itself by the Divine standard—correct what is amiss; and, for the sake of truth, principle and character, study to adorn the doctrine of Christ in all things. It will not do to contend by *words* that our churches are purer and more scriptural than other professing communities. Congregational churches must prove their superiority by *deeds*. They must show their heavenly credentials in the splendour of their own light; and unless their brightness contrast with the dimness of other churches, in vain shall they make their claim to be more scriptural than they.

We labour under the double disadvantage of being *dissenters* from the religious establishment of the country, and of having arrayed against us other bodies from whose presbyterianism we dissent as much as from that of the endowed sect. All these bodies are nearer to each other, than any of them are to us. With some we are one as voluntaries, and in our theology we are generally agreed, but their entire ecclesiastical frame-work presents so many points of difference that we cannot flatter ourselves with the prospect of approaching much nearer to union with them than we now are. There is nothing of consequence to prevent *all* the presbyterian bodies in Scotland (excepting the Established Church, which, in this matter, is not a free agent) from amalgamation or incorporation. But till their terms of church communion and ours—to say nothing of our different ideas concerning what a church is—harmonise, we must remain separate, and can enjoy even intercom-

munion only in a very imperfect degree. It were easy to descendant on the gratifying approach which some congregations around us have made to our principles and practice in the matter of purity and also frequency of communion. We hail this as a token that this leaven of purity will yet pervade the mass, and then we shall find ourselves more one with them than they or we imagined. Meanwhile, so far as our distinctive principles are concerned, our position viewed relatively to other professing bodies remains what it has always been. Our views of social Christianity remain unchanged, and our brethren of various denominations, in the midst of whom we dwell, hold as firmly all the essential points of their church polity. But changes have come over them, affecting their mutual relation to each other, and their influence upon the unevangelized portions of the population. This has affected us, as having something to do in the great work of carrying the gospel to neglected and remote districts of the country.

Our churches from the day they were planted have been centres of spiritual light and influence, though perhaps their light was sometimes not seen from afar, and their influence partial even where it reached. Nevertheless many previously involved in darkness were enlightened, and the professing church was moved; careless ministers were tacitly condemned, and faithful ones were roused and encouraged.

We ought to keep such facts in view while tracing the path by which we have reached our present denominational standing, on what terms we occupy it, and what are its responsibilities.

The Independent churches in Scotland, for the last fifty years, have been acting in the way of *indirect influence* upon the religious bodies around them. But they have been acted on in their turn. It would require a searching and extensive examination of the whole subject to bring out to view the various influences direct and reflex, which have been operating upon the various denominations in Scotland, during the period in question, and the combined effect of which, we see in the actual state of parties at this day.

To attempt this is not our object, nor is it necessary for our present purpose; but every successive year develops more fully the changes referred to.

1.) In the *Scottish Establishment* matters are now very different from what they were when congregationalism began to make itself heard and seen within the bounds of her parishes.

2.) A *powerful sect* has sprung out of the bosom of that Establishment, already boasting of numbers and commanding resources surpassing those of any other religious body in the country.

3.) Other presbyterian sections of the church, that formerly stood in frowning opposition to each other, are now fused into one community. Most of these changes are steps in an onward career towards true spiritual liberty, and give indication that the establishments of religion supported by the state are waxing old, and, we trust, about to vanish away. Statesmen and politicians may plan the extension and reckon upon the perpetuity of the unholy alliance, but, we know that the doom of Babylon is

sealed, and can have no doubt as to the ultimate issue. Such matters however come not within our present range of subject.

Meanwhile, our own churches do not occupy the ground they once did, and we must open our eyes to the fact. In cities and in large towns this may be less obvious, but in remote districts it is strongly felt.

Once, our ministers were the only itinerant preachers of the gospel in destitute parts of the country. *Once* they were the only preachers of the gospel in its purity and simplicity in many villages and even large towns. *Once* our preachers, wherever they appeared, could rally round them many who knew and loved the gospel, though holding different views of church government from us. *Once* the Independents were the chief promoters of Sabbath schools—distributors of religious tracts, and at the head of most of the Missionary and Bible Society efforts in their respective localities. It is so no longer, and we rejoice that others take a prominent and honourable part in these efforts of Christian philanthropy. All the evangelical denominations are now active and useful; and from their numbers, wealth and influence in many places, now eclipse the members of our churches. There are now, spread over the length and breadth of Scotland, perhaps a *thousand* preachers of the gospel more than when our evangelists first went forth, and, amid no small obloquy, misrepresentation and opposition, broke up the fallow ground. Such is the change now that some of our itinerants and country pastors can

get a good congregation in their preaching excursions only by obtaining permission to occupy a Free Church pulpit! Others go shares with a brother minister of that or of some other communion, in occupying a place of worship, and preach alternately with such fellow labourer. It is gratifying to know that there is not *now*, in some places at least, such a destitution of the gospel as once existed, and it is pleasant to be on a friendly footing with other servants of Christ; but, viewed *denominationally*, the fact looks dark upon the progress of our principles; for, all such combined efforts of congregationalists with presbyterians or others, impose silence upon points of difference between the parties; and thus all that we hold important and scriptural in regard to church fellowship is merged and lost sight of.

It is not meant that, in their evangelical labours, our pastors and preachers ever sought or should now seek as a *primary object*, to proselyte their hearers to a sect. But, when sinners are converted by their instrumentality, it is but their duty to teach them all things whatsoever Christ hath commanded; and we must hold our distinctive principles as of little worth, if we regard it as a matter of indifference whether converts join a scriptural church, or attach themselves to a body whose principles and practice in the matter of church polity we disapprove of and protest against.

It is well to guard against a sectarian spirit, and to show that we are animated by something better than mere denominational zeal; but I am not sure if our brethren have been always true to their own

principles, when carrying the gospel into destitute districts. They have been contented and glad to be the instruments of saving souls from death, and have left them to form any religious connexion they chose, not grudging though the ranks of another section of the church were swelled with the fruit of their labours.

Now I must beg leave to question the wisdom and the faithfulness of this chivalrous generosity. I doubt whether serious spiritual injury was not done to such converts, by conniving, or appearing to connive at their forming—what we deem—unscriptural connexions, and so, losing all the *personal* and *social* benefits of scriptural church fellowship.

In their sensitive dread of the charge of bigotry, I fear some of our earnest and simple minded brethren have sometimes acted as if they were ashamed or afraid to hold up their principles of church order as worth teaching or contending for. I speak the more emphatically on this point, because I have elsewhere referred with marked approbation (Union Rep. 1848,) to the unselfish and unsectarian labours of our honoured brethren, who have gone forth and laboured rather to bring souls to Christ than to promote the interests of a sect. Their catholic zeal is worthy of all praise; but though they did not seek the increase of their own churches as their *first object*, it does not follow that they ought not to have sought such increase as an object at all.*

* No one will, I hope, suppose that, in the paragraph to which this note refers, the writer would sanction—far less recommend—an attempt by preachers of the gospel to mix up

II. After listening to these statements, some may be disposed to conclude that *now* our churches have fulfilled their mission, so far as the evangelization of the dark corners of the land is concerned; and that if their own candlestick is kept burning in its own place, all is done that can now be either required or expected.

For my part, I hold a different opinion, and think that our churches have yet a bright career of usefulness before them, if they be but true to themselves, and to the principles they represent. It were easy to paint a flattering picture of our prospects, and equally easy perhaps to exhibit a dark and gloomy one. I shall do neither, but simply offer a few remarks and suggestions upon present and obvious duty.

questions of church government with their earnest and faithful exhibition of the way of salvation. Their aim must be to make converts to the faith of Christ—not converts to a sect. But when a sinner is converted from the error of his ways, and asks in the spirit of solicitude what the Lord would have him to do—what as a disciple and a believer is required of him, it is surely the duty of the preacher as he has opportunity to instruct him in all the will of God. And no one can question the right of the preacher to do so, to whatever denomination of Christians he may belong. The only caution and the only condition we would remind him of is, that he ought for his own sake as well as the young convert's, to beware of teaching him for doctrines the commandments of men—and ought to habituate the young disciple from the first to search the Scriptures to see whether these things be so, proving all things by the infallible standard, and admitting nothing as true or binding on the conscience that lacks such authority.

I am strongly impressed with the conviction that our churches are set for the maintenance of great principles—for the exhibition of a scriptural but unpopular church-polity—for a testimony in favour of the separation, not merely of the church and the state, but of *the church and the world*—a testimony unwelcome even to some excellent Christian men of other communions, but, on that account, only the more necessary to be borne.

As Israel of old were perhaps not fully conscious of the value of the deposit of the oracles of God intrusted to them, so perhaps our churches may not be aware of the importance of their position as witnesses for God in the matter of purity of communion, scriptural church discipline and the true independence of every church of Christ. It is the privilege of the smallest equally with the largest of our churches to bear this testimony: and therefore we are disposed to estimate the real importance and salutary influence of a congregational church—if worthy of its name and acting out its principles—by a very different standard than that of its numerical strength, or the wealth and worldly rank of its members.

But the emphasis and effect of the testimony our churches are called to bear, will be in exact proportion to their superior purity, consistency, and scriptural piety. It is not our *form* of church government that is to win the admiration of others, but the *power of godliness* that distinguishes the adherents of that form. It is not our pretension of admitting none but truly converted persons into our

fellowship, that is to convince men of our scriptural character, but the undeniable evidence that our members *are* "new creatures in Christ Jesus,"—that they *are* "not conformed to this world,"—that they have "crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts,"—that they "walk in love as Christ hath loved them,"—that, in a word, they are "saints and holy brethren." Let but our churches sink to the level of some mixed communities around us, in the indiscriminate admission of believers and unbelievers to the church,—let them in laxity of discipline and worldly-mindedness be no better than others,—and our boasted church polity is but a name; nay, will become a delusion and a snare.

With much to be thankful for, and many things to cheer us in the state of the churches, it would be unwise to lay a flattering unction to our souls, and exclaim "All is well!" If there be any one impression deeper than another that ought at the present time to possess us, it is this, that we need a revival of vital piety,—of spiritual fervour,—of holy devotedness to God. A season of languor is, we trust, giving way to a feeling of intense desire for a healthier and happier condition. From the depths of our weakness and lukewarmness we lift up our eyes to the heights of sacred and fervid zeal above us, inspired with hope, and uttering prayer for the heavenly blessing. Obtaining that blessing, the cheering prospect before the churches is one of enlargement, multiplication, enterprise, victory.

It is not to be denied that communities as well as individuals are liable to fall into languor and decay

by the lapse of time. Christian churches are not exempted from the operation of this law, and unless they obtain a fresh infusion of life and vigour with every new generation, their pristine character will soon be lost. Our fathers may have handed down to us the exact model of churches formed according to the New Testament pattern, and which they had found to be so conducive to the promotion of their spiritual interests both personal and social. But unless with the frame-work of the church, they have also transmitted to us the vital principle,—the spirit of love to Christ, and love to the brethren, and love to the souls of men, which distinguished them individually from others as much as their peculiar ecclesiastical polity did, we shall have inherited but the mere shell without the kernel of their religion,—the boards and covering of the tabernacle without the divine power and presence enshrined within it.

How important then, that—if this be the case—the most serious attention be immediately paid to the means of regaining what we have lost. We need more of the power of godliness—more of the vital Christianity of the New Testament; and, had we this, there would be little danger from foes without or factions within. It is when Christian doctrine fails to be embodied in holy Christian practice, that errors creep in and gain currency. There is a closer connexion between a godly life and a sound creed than many imagine, and more danger of the spread of doctrinal error, from the prevalence of a low state of religion in the churches, than from the arguments or the efforts of unsound men.

The churches individually, it is hoped, will improve the present occasion for the great and salutary purposes sketched in the *Circular* respecting the Jubilee services. Those topics fall more directly under the notice of other brethren appointed to take part in our proceedings. I may be allowed, however, to call attention to the—

1. *Duty of united action* in matters bearing on the general prosperity of the churches,—the spread of the gospel,—the glory of our Divine Redeemer. Every passing year brings more fully to light the advantages of *union*; and we shall be wanting to ourselves if we strive not to secure these advantages in the highest possible degree. We must unite in order to co-operate. We must meet together to become stronger. We must pray together to become holier. We must deliberate together to become wiser; resolving with one heart and soul, to do what our hands find to do; helping one another, sympathizing with one another, loving one another,—sharing the blessed fellowship of activity in our Lord's service, and sharing also the no less blessed fellowship of suffering for his sake. Our churches should be attentive observers of each other's movements; looking on, not with suspicion or envy, but with the warm interest of friends and brethren. The prosperity of each should gladden all; the trials of each should awaken the sympathy of all; the zeal and love of each should be a pattern to all.

2. Our late shaking has been sifting and, I hope, salutary to our churches. It has brought out very satisfactorily the characteristic *elasticity* of our

churches, constituted on a simple and scriptural model. They do not break with a blow. They do not sink under the weight of a cumbrous and artificial frame-work. They are sufficiently independent to enjoy freedom of speech and action, and yet sufficiently united to *cohere* and support one another when common principles call for united effort.

3. In our present circumstances we are peculiarly called upon, and, I think, greatly encouraged to support our own denominational institutions. The Congregational Union and Theological Academy should share the generous support of the churches. Some of them have hitherto failed in the performance of this duty. It would be well to celebrate the Jubilee year by this as well as other "good works for necessary uses,"—*all* resolving henceforth to contribute annually according to their ability towards the maintenance of these institutions.—The removal of the burden of Chapel Debts renders this duty at once easier and more imperative.

4. We have not yet done ourselves justice in regard to a wise and effective use of the PRESS. Our periodical literature ought to be more patronized, and whatever is needful to improve or extend it, or bring it into a state of better adaptation to our wants and wishes as a denomination, should receive earnest and prompt attention. Hitherto the zeal and talents of some of our brethren, who have come forward nobly in this department of service, have not met with corresponding encouragement on the part of our churches. The churches have patronized the cheap literature provided for them by others,

and have left unheeded what was more peculiarly *their own*. They have not done what they ought to have done to secure for themselves advantages which it is not safe to neglect, and which nothing but cold-hearted indifference or ignorance would deem of little value.

It is hoped this reference to our denominational literature will not be construed into anything like a confession of inability to support the Congregational Magazine. That publication has a circulation not surpassed by that of any denominational organ either in the North or the South, if the rule be one of *proportion* between the numerical strength of the denomination and the circulation of its Magazine.

But we ought to do *more* than we do, and if we are wise and zealous, and true to ourselves, we shall not long be satisfied with our present doings in the employment of the Press.

5. For these and other objects we are far behind in the matter of *organization*. Many of our churches are almost without any regular and systematic method of furthering any one good object. Our Presbyterian friends read us a lesson here, it would be well for us to learn. They have their associations for missions and schools,—their tract-lending and tract-distributing agencies,—their Bible and Missionary auxiliaries in almost every congregation. They proceed on the obvious principle, that all their members should take their share in these efforts,—that there is work for all, and help to be rendered by all,—that the poor must contribute as well as

the rich, and all work together, none being idle and none useless.

There is far too little of this in many of our churches. The pastor is expected to do everything, and the members nothing. Or if there be a few leading active members of the church, all the rest seem to make the energy of these few the reason or excuse for their doing nothing at all. The same may be said concerning pecuniary contribution. If there be a few wealthy and generous members of the church, they are expected to bear the entire burden, or all but a fraction—that fraction being the share the great majority of the church assess themselves with as their due proportion.

There is great need for a reform in these things; and it is full time we were setting about it. There must be more system in the working of the churches, and in turning their capabilities to the best account. They must *do* more, and *give* more, and *shine* more; and this can be effected with a better organization than we have yet adopted. For instance—1. It is vain to expect that our SUNDAY SCHOOLS can prosper when the members of the church take little interest in them. These flourish or decay just as the church furnishes proper teachers, sustains their efforts, and lends all needful countenance and aid. 2. It cannot be that CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION efforts can be vigorously conducted if the church care not to learn what is done or needed to be done—neither looks at the field, nor considers the labour it requires. 3. The weekly meetings of the church are in many instances ill attended, and this is always

an index to the state of vital piety in the church. That must be low when the church meeting is thin. The pastor is discouraged, and the few that do attend to the duty are grieved.

6. The due performance of all these obligations will involve the sacrifice of *time* and *convenience*, and will also test the *liberality* of the church-member. But the sacrifice must be made. It *costs* something to be a consistent and useful member of a Christian church. It is cheap and easy to hold back, and say in reference to urgent duties, "I pray thee have me excused;" but if we would prosper, and edify our brethren, and benefit the world and honour Christ, we must all *do more* and better than we have done.

Our practice is defective in the matter of *association*. I say "our *practice*," because we hold no *principle* that stands in the way. By *association* we mean those meetings, whether periodical or occasional, of ministers and members of churches, which might be rendered highly conducive to their spiritual comfort and progress, and especially tending to the expansion of Christian affections towards brethren of other churches. We ought to take a deeper interest than we do in the joys and sorrows, the success and the discouragements of our brethren of neighbouring churches. The occasional interchange of pulpits among pastors might also be rendered subservient to the general good. I need not multiply words on this subject; but I am deeply persuaded that we stand too much aloof from one another, not giving proof sufficiently palpable and frequent that

we are *one*, and that we *do* sympathise warmly and affectionately with each other.

If the churches sink into spiritual selfishness, seeking only their own edification, they will defeat their own object, for spiritual comfort and progress are not compatible with unconcern for the spiritual good of others. They who are useless must be comfortless; and a church that is not a blessing to the world, finds little blessing and no joy within its own border.

7. Our churches, then, have a work to do as well as a testimony to bear. They are not now alone in the efforts to be made for the evangelization of the great mass of the people; but they are not superseded. Even allowing that other labourers are zealous and able—and most thankful are we to recognise the gratifying fact—the fitness of many of our brethren for itinerant labours cannot be questioned. Should any one doubt whether efforts of this kind are still needed in Scotland, we point to the thousands of careless, ignorant, unconverted men everywhere to be found. If such cannot be got to assemble together in great congregations to hear the gospel preached, they must be reached in some other way, and addressed though in smaller numbers. They surely are—they must be—accessible through some channel. Let that mode of address, and that agency suited to accomplish the end, be carefully considered, and perseveringly employed, and a blessing may be expected. Let us have faith in God as our fathers had, and serve him as they did, and our labours shall not be in vain in the Lord.

8. And nothing can prosper if *prayer* be neglected. The whole range of duty now adverted to must be attended to in the spirit of prayer. In many cases *district prayer-meetings* are held with great advantage to those who attend them, and the increase of these would be a token for good. If our churches are indeed scriptural, vital religion ought to flourish in them as in a genial soil. Remaining equally barren with other enclosures around us, where is the evidence that "we are a field the Lord hath blessed?" A wintry season may have frozen up our energies, and chilling blasts may have withered our branches; but the spring time will return, when the influences of heaven will send down new life, and spread new beauty over the weary heritage.

A great work, then, is before the churches; and we should augur well for its speedy and successful accomplishment, did we but see the churches glowing with love to each other, as fellow-helpers to the truth, and rising in the might of their united energies *to do that work*. What is it?—the evangelization of our country—the conversion of the world!

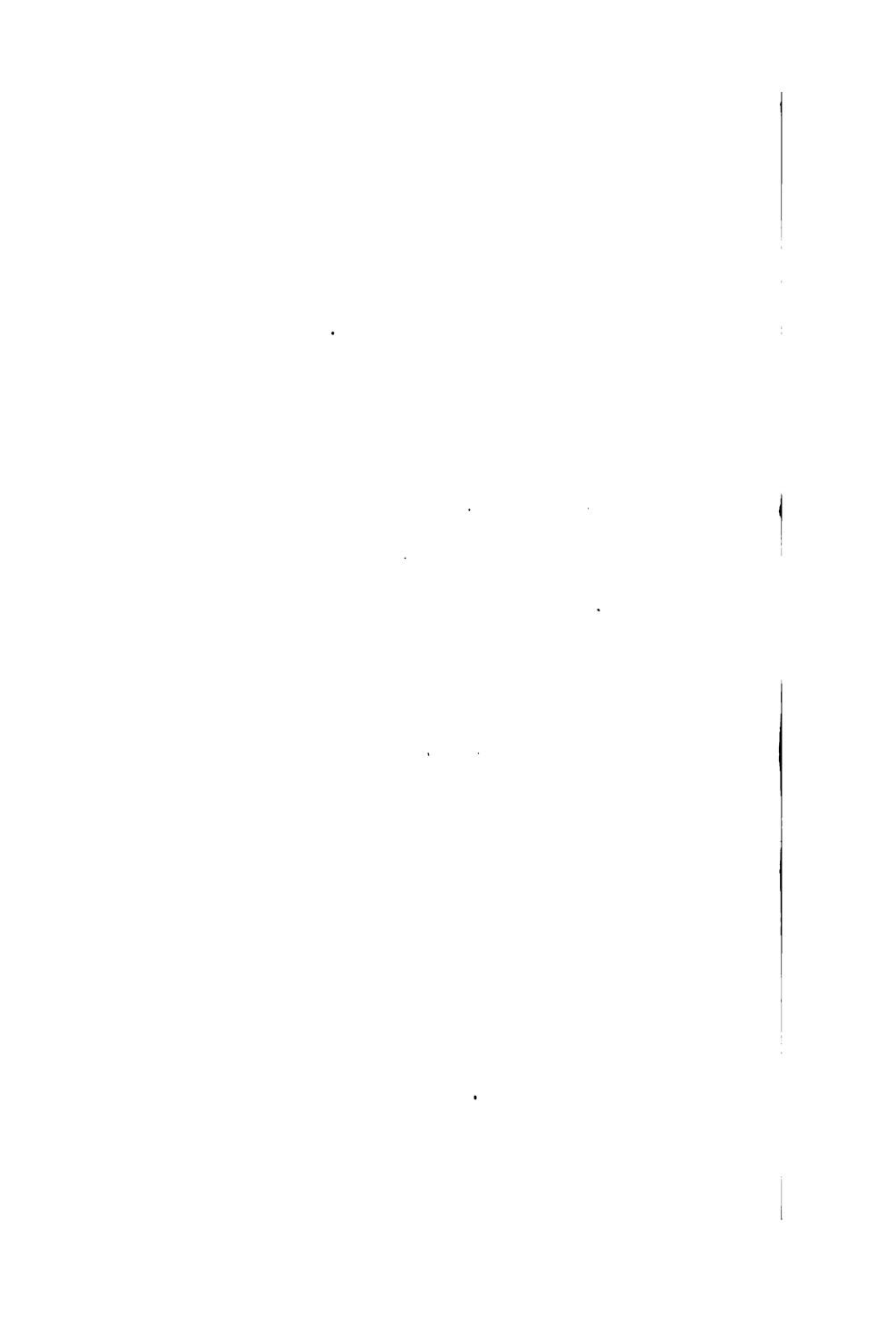
The missionary character of our churches has been conspicuous from the beginning hitherto; and, I trust, will continue in all its original vigour and efficiency. Foreign as well as Home Missions ask and deserve our zealous and prayerful attention. Should our interest in either decline, it would be a token that the "glory" was departing from us. Nothing can chill our ardour in the Missionary cause—for it is the cause of Christ—but the chill of spiritual death. Churches and institutions that hin-

der rather than help in this grand enterprise must expect to be thrown aside, or trampled down beneath the tread of the armies of the Lord, in their march to fight his battles, and claim for Him the peaceful dominion of the whole earth.

May it now manifestly appear that the set time is come! Then will our Jubilee year be "a time to call to remembrance," and a time to be had in remembrance, till a second half-century shall have measured its period. Solemn thought, that ere that day, we who take part in this celebration shall be reckoned among the men of a bye-gone time! We shall have finished our course and rendered up our account! Without the gift of prophecy it were vain to conjecture what the circumstances of our *Centenary* may be: but let it be the determination of each and all of us so to live and labour and pray that *that* Jubilee may be to them who come after us an auspicious one,—happy and grand and glorious beyond what the boldest imagination now dares to contemplate.

ON
PURITY OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP
AS HISTORICALLY DISTINCTIVE OF
CONGREGATIONAL INDEPENDENCY.

BY RALPH WARDLAW, D. D.



PURITY OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

MR. CHAIRMAN,—

THE topic which has been assigned to me for this evening is—PURITY OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

Having recently laid my views on this subject, so much at large, before the churches and the public, I was at first somewhat startled on receiving a request to speak upon it in Edinburgh and here. I soon found, however, that it was not as a scriptural question, with the view, that is, to establish the obligation laid upon the churches by the authority of Christ to the maintenance of such purity, that I was at all expected to take it up; but simply as a distinctive characteristic (in so far as it could fairly be so regarded) of the churches in this country, of the Congregational order.—To this one point, therefore, I mean now strictly to confine myself:—and I wish this to be specially attended to, to account for my not at all entering into the discussion of the question itself.

The subject, as imposed upon me, wears somewhat of the aspect of what is seldom either seemly or agreeable—*self-commendation*:—not indeed directly personal,—but denominational; which can be

regarded as personal only in as far as, when speaking of our denomination, we speak of ourselves,—each of us being part and parcel of the body to which we belong. In speaking upon it, therefore, I would not be unmindful of the wise man's salutary caution—"Let another praise thee, and not thine own lips; a stranger, and not thine own mouth." I shall studiously avoid all invidious, uncharitable, ill-natured reflections upon other sections of the Christian church; except in so far as such reflections may be necessarily involved in the simple exhibition of *facts*. It may be found, for example, that laxity of admission and discipline, and consequent impurity of communion, have, in point of fact, both in older and more recent times, been pleaded among the grounds of separation from other bodies. And this may be more especially the case as to *national churches*. If it be so, we cannot help it. And indeed with regard to such national churches, there is no great room, or occasion, for delicacy or reserve; worldliness—the mixture of "the precious and the vile"—the confounding of the Christian and the citizen—being, to a greater or less extent, inseparable from the Church-and-State union; at least as that union has been modelled in every nationally endowed church that has hitherto existed,—and, we may safely add, that ever *can* exist.

In briefly treating the subject, under this simply historical aspect of it, I shall not travel out of Britain. But neither shall I confine myself to Scotland. Independency was of much earlier origin in the South, than in the North. And my first object will be,—

going back to the commencement of its history there, to show, by a few brief citations, that the point now before us—the purity of Church Communion—or the materials, in regard to character, of which churches of Christ should be composed,—did from the first, and all along afterwards, form an essential element in every constitution of such churches drawn up by Congregational separatists; and a ground on which they rested and justified their separation. My citations shall be taken, almost entirely, from *Mr. Hanbury's* three ponderous but valuable volumes, entitled “Historical Memorials relative to the Independents or Congregationalists.” They shall be from Brown, Robinson, Ainsworth; as well as from sundry documents of a more public character. I had marked a couple of scores. I select a small sample.—In quoting two sentences from *Brown*, to whom the first English Independents owed the designation of *Brownists*,—a designation which, from the subsequent inconsistencies and defection from his principles (by some questioned, but, it is feared, too well authenticated) of that leader, became of course distasteful and inappropriate,—I have only to remark, that this unworthiness of his later course has no bearing either against the *fact* that the principles laid down by him were the principles of the sect of which he was the leader, nor against the soundness of the principles themselves. In a book entitled “A Book which sheweth the Life and Manners of all true Christians, &c.,” published in the year 1582, he thus writes:—“*The church planted or gathered is a company or number of Christians or believers,*

who, by a willing covenant made with their God, are under the government of God and Christ, and keep his laws in one holy communion, because Christ hath redeemed them unto holiness and happiness for ever, from which they were fallen by the sin of Adam.—The *church government* is the Lordship of Christ in the communion of his offices ; whereby his people *obey to his will*, and have mutual use of their graces and callings, to further their godliness and welfare.”—And his description of *discipline*, as the instituted means of maintaining purity, is scripturally correct and stringent.

Both Brown and Barrow, and others, in those times of trial, bore their firm testimony, even when judicially questioned, against the *identity of the nation and the church*, and against “*the mingling of all sorts*” in the parish “*assemblies*.”

Robinson—a name in high and just celebrity in the annals of Independency—when answering a certain censorious epistle by a country curate—thus writes:—“The separation we have made, in respect of our knowledge and obedience, is indeed ‘late’ and ‘new:’—yet is it, in the nature and causes thereof, as ancient as the Gospel, which was first founded in the enmity which God himself put between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent ; which enmity hath not only been successively continued, but also visibly manifested in the actual separation of all true churches from the world in their collection and constitution, before the law, under the law, and under the gospel. Which separation the Church of England neither hath made nor

doth make; but stands actually one with all that part of the world within the kingdom, without separation:—for which cause, amongst others, we have chosen, by the grace of God, rather to separate ourselves to the Lord from it, than with it from him, in the visible constitution of it.” The date of this is about 1610.

Thus again, in answer to *Bernard*:—“And for the gathering of a church, I do tell you, that in what place soever, by what means soever,—whether by the preaching of the gospel by a true minister, by a false minister, by no minister,—or by reading, conference, or any other mode of publishing it,—two or three faithful people do arise, separating themselves from the world into the fellowship of the gospel and covenant of Abraham,—THEY are a Church, truly gathered, though never so weak;—a House and Temple of God, rightly *founded* on ‘the doctrine of the apostles and prophets, Christ himself being the chief corner stone, (Eph. ii. 20,) against which the gates of hell shall not prevail;’ nor,” (he adds, with amusingly sarcastic naïveté,) “your disgraceful invectives neither.”

Next we adduce *Henry Ainsworth*. In his controversy with *Broughton*, he says:—“We testify against the corrupt and false estate of your English cathedral and parish assemblies—*First*, as not being a communion of saints, a people called and separated from the world, and brought into covenant with God:—*Secondly*, as not worshipping him aright, in spirit and in truth, according to his own law, but after human inventions,” &c.

To another opponent (*Bernard*) he writes:—"We have left Babylon, for to come unto Zion. We forsook your confused assemblies, which consist of all sorts of people, and an unlawful mixture with the profane and wicked, that we might have communion with the people of the Lord, that willingly and gladly profess to believe the gospel, and walk in it:"—and he goes on to refute his opponent's appeal, on this point, to the Old Testament.

Again, in his *Treatise on the Communion of Saints*: chap. 16.—"This gathering together of the saints is not a bare assembly, or concourse only of people, but a new uniting and knitting of themselves in one holy communion and fellowship."—"The strength and virtue of this union of the saints proceedeth from the unity of their faith and spirit."—And then he proceeds to consider the divine reasons for making this fellowship the duty of God's people;—into which we cannot follow him.

The following is Article xxxvii. of "A Confession of Faith of certain English people living in the low countries, exiled,"—of whom the said Henry Ainsworth was one of the chief:—"Such as yet see not the truth, may, notwithstanding, hear the public doctrines and prayers of the Church; and with all meekness are to be sought by all means. Yet none who are grown in years may be received into their communion as members, but such as do make confession of their faith, publicly desiring to be received as members, and promising to walk in the obedience of Christ."

In 1616, we have—"A Confession and Protesta-

tion of the faith of certain Christians in England, holding it necessary to keep all Christ's true substantial ordinances for his Church visible, &c. &c.:—published for the clearing of the said Christians from the slander of schism and novelty, &c. &c." It contains the following as its 15th Article:—"Touching the profane and scandalous mixtures of people in the congregation—we believe, concerning mixtures of the open profane with some manifest godly Christians in a visible church, that what soul soever, in such a church state, desireth to be in safety, ought, with all diligence, to leave that spiritual society wherein he standeth thus, and join a better. A little leaven will leaven the whole lump;—much more where there is a great quantity, as now with us it is," &c.—Of course I enter into no discussion now, as to the precise stage in advancing corruption, at which such withdrawal may become a duty; a question of somewhat delicate casuistry.

Passing over a variety of Extracts of a kindred character, from various hands, we come to what Mr. Hanbury calls "The famous apologetical Narration, humbly submitted to the Hon. the Houses of Parliament," in 1663, by the Independent brethren in the Westminster Assembly, "Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, Jeremiah Burrowes, William Bridge." It contains the following remarkable passage:—"Thirdly:—Whereas one great controversy of these times is about the qualifications of the members of churches, and the promiscuous receiving and mixing of good and bad. Therein we chose the better part; and, to be sure, received in none

but such as all the churches in the world, by the balance of the sanctuary, acknowledge faithful.—The rules which we gave up our judgments unto, to judge those we received in amongst us by, were of that latitude as would take in any member of Christ; the meanest, in whom may be supposed to be the least of Christ:—and indeed such, and no other, as all the godly in the kingdom carry in their bosoms to judge others by. We took measure of no man's holiness by his opinion, whether concurring with us or adverse to us"—(that is, very evidently, in matters not affecting the essential articles of saving truth). "And churches made up of such, we were sure no Protestant could but approve of, as touching the members of it, to be a true church, with which communion might be held."

In a subsequent publication—"The Saints' Apology; or a Vindication of those Churches which endeavour after a Pure Communion, from the odious names of Brownists and Separatists,"—the same views are presented thus:—"Secondly:—The *matter* of this church is a company of saints; such, of whom, as the Apostle, so the church that admits them, or joins with them, ought to think it meet to judge of every one of them, that Christ hath 'begun a good work in them,' and will finish it. The Apostles always style them 'saints' and 'faithful brethren,'—or 'the church in such a place, which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ;' saints by calling, sanctified in Christ Jesus; the church 'elected together with them:' and such like titles, applicable only unto men sanctified. That they

ought to be such in profession, will not be denied; and that they ought to be what they profess, is as evident."—Then follows the great rule of discipline, to be put in execution against offenders, in order to the preservation of purity,—closing with these words:—"And he who is to be cast out, when he is known, ought not to be admitted, could he be known to be other than a saint by the church, before he was received."

It may not be out of place to quote a passage here from the communication, relative to the controversies then agitated in England, sent to the Westminster Assembly by the Wallachrian Classis,—as giving, in very temperate terms, the sentiments held by these continental Presbyterian churches on the present subject;—the more especially as they correspond so nearly with those held by brethren who differ from us, in our own fatherland:—"We affirm, that to the external and visible church the pastors are to admit those who profess the true religion, and the faith of Christ, lead their lives without scandal, or, being fallen into scandals, do by repenting, wash themselves *in foro ecclesie*" [at the church's tribunal], "submit themselves to discipline, publicly frequent all exercises of divine worship, and desire church communion with us, *although they do not manifest such evident signs of regeneration as may convince the consciences of the church of their true faith in Christ.*"—You will readily perceive (I may, in passing, remark) the coincidence between this representation and not a few more modern ones; in which a latitude is left, so conveniently wide, as to what really constitutes

the nature and amount of offence incurring the epithet of *scandal*; and in which too there is a seeming distinction made between signs of *Christianity* and signs of *regeneration*,—as if there were actually any difference between the one and the other,—as if any man could be a *Christian* who was not a *regenerate man*! What a laxity in actual practice becomes conceivable, if, in admitting to their fellowship, “the consciences of the churches” do not require to be “convinced” of the applicant’s “true faith in Christ!”—The grounds of such conviction form of course a distinct question: but the conviction itself seems to be the essential principle of pure communion,—the principle of confidence, among the members of the churches, in one another’s Christianity; seeing without this, there cannot be any such thing as—“*loving as brethren*,” or “*keeping the unity of the Spirit*.”—They proceed to state, that in some of the congregations of their Classis the admission was more strict:—but they add, that such extra strictness, though laudable, and not contrary to the general order maintained among them, was yet “*beside*” that order, and more than they regarded as required by the Word of God.

Similar are the sentiments, more extendedly given, in Hooker and Cotton’s “Survey” of the principles of the Separatists:—and, although expressed in terms equally moderate,—in terms, indeed, capable, were we ourselves allowed the interpretation of them, of even being adopted by us as our own confession of faith on the point in question,—yet are they, at the same time, equally capable, when interpreted by *them*, of admitting no little laxity.

My last Extract shall be from the "Savoy Declaration"—entitled—"A Declaration of the Faith and Order owned and practised in the Congregational Churches in England; agreed upon, and consented unto, by their Elders and Messengers, in their meeting at the Savoy—October 12th, 1658." I satisfy myself with one very short article. The subsequent articles, on discipline, &c., are in scriptural harmony with it:—"The members of these churches are saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing, in and by their profession and walking, their obedience unto that call of Christ; who, being further known to each other by their confession of the faith wrought in them by the power of God, declared by themselves, or otherwise manifested, do willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ, giving up themselves to the Lord, and to one another by the will of God, in professed subjection to the ordinances of the Gospel."

Such, then, were the views on this subject, avowed and acted upon by the early Leaders of independency in the South of our island, in the interesting era of the persecuted and exiled "*pilgrim fathers*," and those to whom they bequeathed the legacy of their principles and their sufferings. They were views with the scriptural authority and the vital importance of which they were deeply impressed, and their tenacious adherence to which and determined stand for them, procured them from their enemies the charge of schismatic obstinacy and presumption.—And the Congregational Churches of England and

Wales hold fast the principles; though happily, in these days of religious freedom, not called to suffer for them as of old. In the "Declaration of faith, order, and discipline, adopted at the general meeting of the Southern Congregational Union, in 1833"—we have the following article:—"The Congregational Churches hold it to be the will of Christ that *true believers* should voluntarily assemble together, to observe religious ordinances, to promote *mutual edification, and holiness*, to perpetuate and propagate the gospel in the world, and to advance the glory and worship of God, through Jesus Christ:—and that each society of believers, having these objects in view in its formation, is properly a Christian Church."

To those who know any thing of the great movement in Scotland, from which our churches date their origin,—whether from their having, like myself, been then in the days of their youth, and, if not taking an active or prominent part in it, yet eagerly watching its progress,—or having derived their information from the published records of the period,—it is needless to say, for it is notorious, that it had in part for its origin the scandalizing effect of impurity of communion, more especially in the Established Church, on the consciences of those godly men, who were then and thus stirred up to inquiry into the true scriptural constitution of the churches of Christ, as laid down and exemplified in the New Testament Scriptures.—The corruption which then prevailed, when *moderation* was triumphantly dominant, was even more glaringly offensive

than it is now.—And in no one of the denominational communions had the attention of Christians been at all sufficiently awakened to the subject. The habits acquired in the Establishment had, more than enough, affected the practice of those who had seceded from it; and the natural temptation too was felt, more strongly than it ought to have been, of yielding to the ambition of having the appearance and *eclat* of a growing and prospering Body.

I do not speak of the formation of even the earliest of our churches as having been the *origin of independency* in Scotland. So it is not uncommonly spoken of amongst us. But it was not so. We had been preceded by Glas, and Sandeman, and by Smith and Ferrier, as well as others, both before and after their times; those named giving origin to the denominations of the *Glassites* or *Sandemanians*,—and of those whom we have been accustomed to call the *Old Independents*. Into any consideration of the differences between their order and ours, it would be quite out of season to enter now. It is enough to say, that the question about the materials of a church—the question of pure communion—was not one of them.—With some of the Glassite and Sandemanian leaders, it is true, there was to be found, springing from a mistaken horror of what they regarded as a species of *Cant* and *Puritanical strictness*, with which Sandeman, in his characteristic charity, always associated the idea of a kind of self-righteous prudery,—more than enough of laxity in their interpretation of the apostolic interdict—“Be not conformed to this world.” But in regard to the

principle that a church of Christ should be an association of believers, or disciples, they were one with ourselves.—The secession of *John Glas* from the Church of Scotland took place in the year 1728, —and was therefore threescore and ten years in antecedence of the formation of our earliest churches, and the opening of our history. And both in his “King of Martyrs”—and more especially in one or two of his subsequent pieces,—that, for instance, entitled—“A Congregation or Church of Jesus Christ, with its presbytery, is in its discipline, subject to no jurisdiction under heaven”—and his letter on “Communicating with unworthy Receivers,”—the principle is to be found, both as a generally pervading one, and in occasional explicit statement. Thus in the former of the two last mentioned tractates,—“We cannot discern between the common and special operations of the Spirit in others, or betwixt a temporary believer, who may fall away, and them that ‘believe to the saving of the soul.’ But, as he that ‘hath not the Spirit of Christ is’ (undoubtedly) ‘none of his,’—so he that no way appears, by his profession of the faith, to have the Spirit, no way appears to be one of Christ’s; and so is no fit member for a Congregation of Jesus Christ:”—and in the latter,—“And though he hath not given any of them the key to men’s hearts, yet hath he pointed out to all, in his word, the objects of this brotherly love, with whom he commands us to hold communion, and those from whom he commands us to turn away. Communicants must be the objects of this love: and we must know so much concerning

those with whom we communicate, before we 'eat of that bread, and drink of that cup' with them. And so have we no occasion for troubling ourselves, in communicating, with censoriousness, and dwelling upon one another's faults; but we rather thus come together every one of us fearing concerning himself, lest *he* should be the only person in all the company whom the Lord should find wanting the wedding-garment."—I speak now, then, of the origin of what may be called *modern independency* in Scotland:—meaning of course by *modern* that it differed in some particulars, and these not unimportant, from that which in this country had preceded it,—not that it was *new* in the sense of differing from the constitution which had the sanction of the apostolic authority, and, consequently, the antiquity of the apostolic age.

To these modern Independents in Scotland, very soon after they seceded from the national and other communions,—and laid the foundation of their separate fellowship,—it happened, just as, in the days of old, it happened to the English Refugees in Holland, that, as Hanbury expresses it, they "*fell out among themselves*."—It was the natural enough result of their recent emancipation from the bondage of human systems. Various were the controversies which arose. And it would be far from the truth to say, that they were always sufficiently characterised by "the meekness and gentleness of Christ."—Some of the debates were ridiculous enough;—the crude and hasty novelties and semi-hallucinations of a transition state, in which "men were seen as trees

walking;"—the freaks and vagaries of a new born and inexperienced freedom.—Yet the disputations did good. They promoted the close investigation of the Word of God; for to that authority alone the appeal was made. The atmosphere was purified and cleared by the passing and shifting blasts, and then settled down to a comfortable calm.—But what I wish at present to state and impress, is this;—that the point of which I am now speaking *never was one of these subjects of controversy*. The duty of separation from the world in the communion of the Church, never was a matter of question amongst our fathers and founders. In all their representations of the reasons of their separation from former religious connexions, *mixed communion* held a prominent place. Nor has it ever been a matter of question during the half century that has passed over us. God forbid that it ever should! And God forbid too, that, while we continue to avow it as a principle, we should be found departing from it in our practice; and that, by such departure, our churches should come to be swamped by an inundation of worldliness.

This characteristic of independency became the object of wrath and ridicule. Just as the men of the world are accustomed to throw out their sarcasms against those whom they regard as the "righteous overmuch," so did even good men, scornfully or bitterly, inveigh against the idea of a pure church. They called the very attempt at it presumption,—a judging of the heart,—an assuming of the prerogative of God,—a going beyond and improving upon the Bible. Such

charges might at times have their origin in mistaken conceptions merely. It is to be feared, however, their source was not always so innocent; that there was too often a little,—perhaps, without violating truth or charity, I might say *not* a little,—of venomous bitterness against the system of independency in general,—what was then called "*the new sect in the land.*"—The leaders of the original movement became the objects of jealousy and persecution. Their disinterested labours were interrupted and thwarted; their characters were defamed; their persons were attached under form of law, though in fact in opposition to it; they were put in durance; they were carried before magistrates; they were seized by press-gangs, and sent aboard tenders. The interdictions and anathemas, moreover, of united Moderatism and Evangelism were thundered against them. They persevered, however, and in the strength and by the blessing of God they prospered. And "we are entered into their labours." Let us emulate their devoted zeal. May that zeal be rekindled by our present recollections of it, and commemoration of its doings!—In what respects soever, at the same time, we may have fallen behind them,—failing of the "first love,"—we have not abandoned the original grounds of their separation; and especially the great principle of which I now speak. We have kept by that principle. And good cause we this day have, to "thank God and take courage." The principle has since, silently and imperceptibly, been gaining ground,—working its way to more general adoption and practice. It has recommended itself to not a few of our

brethren in other denominations. How far this might or might not have been the case, but for the example set, it is not for us to say. Certain it is, however, that the progress,—the process of leavening,—has been within the period of our half century; and certain it is too that, with some of the more candid among our brethren in other bodies, independency has got the chief credit of it.—The case of *purity* of communion stands, in this respect, in the same predicament with that of *frequency* of communion. Well do I remember, in my earlier days, when, by the generality of God's people in other denominations, this too was *scouted* as one of the innovations and peculiarities of independency (which then stood in the same category with popery and "black prelacy"); and the participation of the Lord's supper every week was regarded by some with a feeling akin to horror, as absolute profanation and mockery. Yet this principle has been working its way forward too; and although, amongst our presbyterian friends, *weekly* communion has not by any been adopted, *quarterly* has become common; and *monthly*, I believe, is not without its examples, in practice, and in wish and aim,—which last would place those friends on a par, in this point, with our independent brethren in the South.—Now, just thus has it been with our principle of *pure* communion. The indignant ridicule and reprobation with which it was wont to be assailed has, to a great extent, been hushed. And in different quarters, on different occasions, amongst our presbyterian brethren, the principle has been earnestly and ably contended for, and the charge of

neglecting and disregarding it has been indignantly repudiated.

This, however, has not been universal. The principle is still not without its assailants. It is not very long since a formal attack was made upon it in an anonymous pamphlet, understood to be from the pen of a justly esteemed minister of the Free Church in the south of Scotland; to which an able, judicious, and most satisfactory reply was published by the excellent Secretary of our Congregational Union.—And more recently still, in a review of Dr. Davidson and myself on Church Polity, in the “Free Church Magazine” for April of the current year (by whom indited I know not), the subject of pure communion, and terms of admission to the fellowship of the Church, is taken up at considerable length.—It might not have been amiss, had that writer, ere he penned the article, spent half an hour in the exercise of self-examination on the brief admonition of the apostle Peter,—“*Be courteous.*” The study of the precept immediately preceding was not so necessary,—seeing, when God’s truth is the subject of discussion, it is not *pity* we want, but only justice, truth, and candour. So far as *we* were concerned, therefore, the admonition “*Be pitiful*” might have been dispensed with, in the apostle’s sense of the word;—and in its only other sense, there was still less need for special attention to it, the article, on some points at least, and this among the rest, being quite as *pitiful* as could reasonably be wished.—But, waiving all reference at present to what is personal, I feel myself warranted to embrace the fair opportunity thus offered, to complain

of the gross and unworthy misrepresentations there given of the principles held and acted upon by the Independent body, and to offer a stricture or two upon them.—To quote at large were unseasonable:—a small specimen must suffice.—“Our Independent friends,” says this writer, “would not receive us, unless both they and ourselves were assured of our conversion; and unless we could give some account of the time, the means, and the manner in which it was effected. And this,” he adds, “suggests our last remark on the Independent plan. Besides the theoretical blunder of demanding a test which no man can apply with certainty, it is chargeable with the more serious offence of practically shifting the ground of a sinner’s acceptance before God, by substituting, in place of the merits of Christ, and the gospel invitation in which these merits are tendered to our faith, an inward persuasion of our conversion, and of our personal interest in the Saviour.”—It is no easy matter to muster up as large a measure of the “charity” which “thinketh no evil” and “believeth all things,” as is sufficient to sustain the persuasion that this was written in sincerity. The setting aside, really or virtually, doctrinally or practically, of the merits of Christ as the ground of the sinner’s “acceptance before God,” and the substituting for them of our own impressions and persuasions about ourselves,—is, I must confess, one of the very last imputations that I could have imagined to be thrown upon us. A “*serious offence*” indeed might this writer call it.—But the imputation, believed or not by him who throws it upon us, wants one essential attribute at

least—that of *truth*. It proceeds upon an assumption that is utterly groundless. For my own part, I do not think I ever put the question to any one applicant for fellowship, respecting the time and circumstances of his conversion, without at the same time intimating that I put it, not because I conceived it indispensable that he should be able to give it a definite and confident answer, but simply because there sometimes were cases, in which the circumstances that had attended the first awakenings and convictions, and the ultimate conversion of sinners, were of special interest,—such as were fitted to illustrate the dealings of the God of grace with human souls, in bringing them to himself, and which it was, therefore, not pleasing and gratifying merely, but eminently instructive and profitable, to know.—And all that he says about “*assurance*” has not only no countenance from the volume he was reviewing, but is in the very teeth of the views I have elsewhere advocated!

Mark further, how he goes on:—“Our Independent friends will be satisfied with nothing short of a full, true, and particular account of our conversion. Their language among themselves, and to the world, is, not a profession of faith in Christianity, but a profession of faith in their being Christians. It amounts to an everlasting iteration of their own saintship,—a perpetual conjugation of the verb—I am converted, thou art converted, he is converted, we are all converted,” &c.—*This*, surely, is sufficiently “pitiful.” But it is worse. It is burlesque, caricature, buffoonery. Nay I go further: it is not

a mere jocular exaggeration of what has partial truth in it, but an accusation unqualifiedly false. Besides the "jesting which is not becoming," it has in it a truthlessness which I am willing to impute to the writer's want of acquaintance with those of whom he writes.

The plain truth is, that neither this writer, nor any writer that has a correct understanding of the principles really held by us, can possibly question those principles, and *write consistently*. At the very moment when they are denying, censuring, vilifying what they represent as our principles, they are distinctly admitting all that we really hold. Let a single sentence, almost immediately following the one just cited, suffice for proof. I had said—"We have seen that, according to the New Testament, a *church* means a *congregation*. It seems very naturally and immediately to follow, that a *Christian church* should be a *congregation of Christians*."—He quotes my words—introducing a parenthesis almost surpassing in pitifulness what I have already adverted to—and adds:—"Very naturally indeed! But what do you mean by *Christians*? If professors of the Christian religion, walking in the ways of Christ, we are agreed:—if true believers, this is taking the whole question for granted." Having read this brief sentence, I have only to say—"Then we are agreed." I could not wish a more satisfactory definition of a *Christian* than "*A professor of the Christian religion, walking in the ways of Christ:*"—understanding, of course, that by "the Christian religion" is meant not anything whatever that is to

be found passing under the name, but the true gospel—"the glorious gospel of the blessed God." If a man professes the faith of this gospel, and is showing the sincerity of his profession by "*walking in the ways of Christ*"—these "ways" being also scripturally defined,—there is no one of our churches that would not give him the right hand of fellowship, as a fit person for their communion. How otherwise indeed *we* are to judge whether a person be, or be not, a "*genuine believer*"—neither I, nor any other pastor or member in the whole independent body, pretends to know. This writer seems to think we *do* make some such pretensions. Where, out of his own mind, he has found his ground for so imagining, I know not. Not, I am sure, in the work he was reviewing. I have no objection to adopt his language, as a correct exponent of my own views, and, so far as I know, of the views of our whole Body:—"God's method of judging differs from ours, as far as heaven is from the earth. 'His thoughts and ways are above ours, as far as the heavens are higher than the earth.' He looks immediately to the heart, and from its spiritual state judges of the language of the lips and of the life. We, not being capable of looking into the heart, can only judge from that language,—in other words, from the profession and the practice. We profess ourselves unable to see any other *media*, equally sure and suitable, by which we can ascertain the materials of a Christian church."—I say again—*Agreed*.—When he adds—"And here again we must hold, that, in judging by these marks, or rather by these rules,

our object is, not to ascertain the person's conversion, but merely to judge of the agreeableness of his character, in profession and in practice, with the laws which Christ has laid down in his word, for the administration of his kingdom,"—I am at a loss to comprehend what the amount is of the qualification of the previous position meant to be conveyed. When he contrasts *God's* method of judging and *ours*, he certainly means that *the thing judged of is the same*. God judges of the state of a man's heart—or rather directly ascertains it—by heart-searching intuition; *we* by outward indications, or *media*. But *the state of the man's heart*, of which, though in different ways, both judge, is the very same thing with *the reality of his conversion*. To say, that it is not this we are to judge of, or seek to ascertain, but only "the agreeableness of his character with the laws of Christ," is to say, that we are to ascertain the *media of judging*, but *not to form the judgment*. This is surely a very imperfect process. He had admitted that *we are* to judge,—only not, like God, intuitively, but by the *media* of profession and practice. What is it, then, of which, by these media, *we are* to judge? Is it not, that, so far as the man's Christianity is ascertainable by our mode of judging, *he is a Christian*? And if so, where lies the difference between his being a *Christian* and his being a *converted man*?—The charge of presumptuously assuming to ourselves the divine prerogative of searching the heart, is one which, I must be pardoned for again saying, I do not, and cannot, believe those who bring it against us to be in earnest in maintaining.

It cannot be. We find them thus, in spite of themselves, laying down the same principles which are held by us, and therefore, unwittingly, incurring the same guilt. If any one wishes to see a demonstration, brought out with all logical clearness, of the unavoidable self-contradictoriness into which, in their censures of them, the professed opponents of our principles fall,—I refer him to the Pamphlet of our Union Secretary before adverted to—entitled “Consistent Christian Fellowship.” No conclusions could be more triumphantly established. We admit to communion those whom we *believe* to be Christians; not whom we *know* to be so by any inspection of the heart (for in this sense it is “the Lord” alone who “*knoweth* them that are his,”) but whom we *believe* to be so, either, if the profession be a first one, from the circumstances and manner in which it is made, and other satisfactory evidences of its sincerity,—or, if it be a profession that has for some time been made, by the still more satisfactory evidence of a consistently godly life;—holding, at the same time, that to believe a man to be a *Christian* is the very same thing as believing him to be a *converted and regenerate man*; finding no ground in Scripture on which any such sentiment can rest, as that a man may be a *Christian* without his having, earlier or later, more gradually or more suddenly, been the subject of converting grace and the new birth.

In one word,—from all that I have seen in print on this subject, my conviction is, that the great difference between different evangelical denominations respecting it is one of *practice* much more than of

principle; that the principles held and avowed are, to a great extent, substantially the same, the chief distinction arising from their reduction or their non-reduction to consistent practice. I have compared the extracts taken from public standards, and from sundry high authorities, in what was until lately the Secession Church, adduced in evidence by my esteemed friend, Dr. Brown, in his reply to Mr. Haldane, entitled "The United Secession Church vindicated from the charge of sanctioning indiscriminate admission to Communion,"—with the extracts which, in the beginning of this address, I have cited from the fathers and founders of Independency; and I must say, that, fairly and candidly interpreted, they are, substantially—in spirit, and to a considerable degree in letter—*identical*,—wanting nothing, on either side, but a *corresponding practice*.

Beloved brethren, pastors and members of Congregational Churches,—If we have at all got a name for carrying out those principles, with a more stringent consistency in our practice than others, let us regard that name (howsoever it may be regarded by others in the light of a reproach) as one of our truest honours. Let the reproach be welcomed as a part of "the reproach of Christ;" and let our sole aim and prayer be, that we may justly deserve it. Let us never be tempted by any relaxation of our strictness, any laxity of admission and discipline, any accommodation to the world, to wipe it off. Never—O never let us be found preferring *numbers* to *character*,—*quantity* to *quality*. Let us beware of the ambition of appearing a flourishing body. To

have no anxiety for the growth and enlargement of our body, were to be renegades to our principles. But the enlargement must be of the right sort. Enlargement by corruption is the reverse of flourishing. It is decay. Numerical strength becomes spiritual weakness. If we cannot gain ground as a religious denomination by any other means than such relaxation in our principles of communion,—let us, by all means, go down. Better to sink with the smile of Christ, than to rise to distinction with his frown. Far from us be the prosperity (falsely so called) that draws toward us the eyes of the world, while it turns away from us those of our Saviour and Lord!

But “we are persuaded better things.” If our principles, as we believe, have the sanction of the word of God, to that God whose word it is we must look for their increasing acceptance and prevalence; ourselves at the same time employing, personally and unitedly, every means consistent with those principles for effecting this end. And among other means, there is one which must ever be first, and never be forgotten,—I mean *consistency between our principles and our practice*. There is a parallelism between the cases of personal and of social profession and character. As individuals must recommend their principles by the consistency which they maintain between what they *say* and what they *do*; so is it with churches. Let the consistent exemplification of our principles in the social anti-worldliness, spirituality, and purity of our churches, never cease to be one, and the first, among the means of promoting them. We lose this precious influence,

whenever we give occasion for its being said, "What do ye more than others?" It is when steadfastly maintaining our consistency that we shall be able, while presenting the prayer for the whole Israel of God, to give it a speciality of application to our own department of that Israel—"SAVE THY PEOPLE, O LORD, AND BLESS THINE INHERITANCE,—FRED THEM ALSO, AND LIFT THEM UP FOR EVER!"

A Ministry Adapted to the Age:

AN ADDRESS

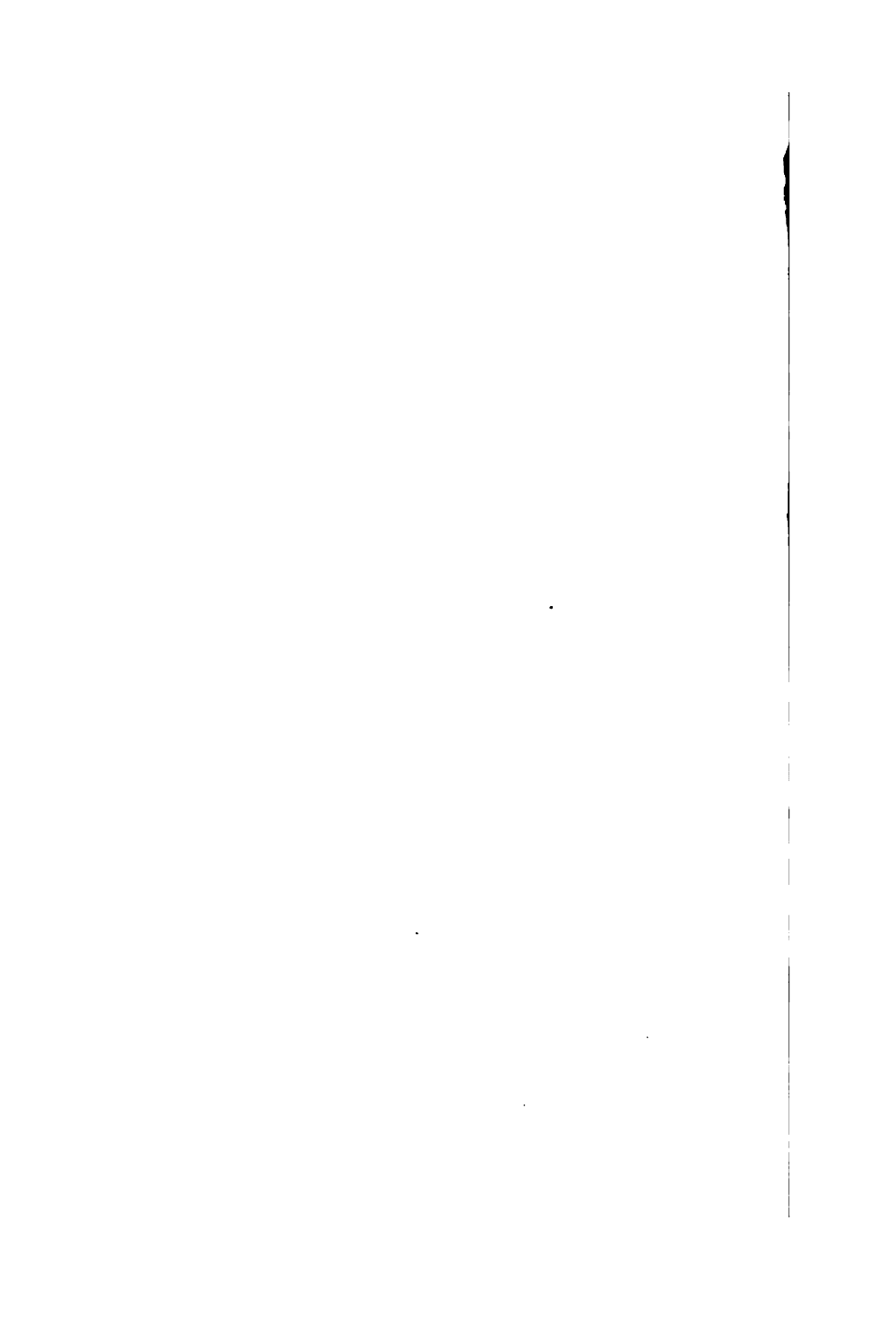
BY REV. ALEXANDER THOMSON A.M.,

PROF. BIB. LITT.,

DELIVERED AT THE PUBLIC MEETING, ARGYLE SQUARE CHAPEL,

EDINBURGH,

ON THURSDAY EVENING, 26TH OCT., 1848.



A MINISTRY ADAPTED TO THE AGE.

I THINK it right to state that the subject of my address is one which I never should have presumed to choose from the promptings of my own mind : I have adopted it solely because it was assigned me by the Committee of arrangement. I have adopted it, not without considerable reluctance, viewing it as one too extensive in its entire relations, and too difficult for me to handle satisfactorily. But I felt at the same time that, however strong and reasonable might be my wish to decline it, the office I held gave you the right of demanding of me an explicit statement of my views on this matter. And, therefore,—while I do not profess to give any information, or to throw any new light on the topics which I shall introduce; and while I shall leave much unsaid that would be most appropriate to the theme, as not being exactly suited to an assembly like the present,—I am willing to be regarded as making in some sort, and to a certain extent, my “Confession of Faith,” as one of the instructors of our theological students.

The great work of the ministry unquestionably is *to preach the gospel*. From this it derives its name

and official standing, its dignity and worth, the fruits of its usefulness and the glory of its power. Whatever other duties it has to discharge arise out of this, and obtain a field for their exercise only as the preaching of the word is successful. Now the gospel, as to its essential substance, admits of no change,—no accommodation,—no development. During the ages that preceded the coming of Christ, it was undergoing a gradual revelation ; but since the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, when “ the whole truth ” was disclosed in the fulness of its splendour, though it has reached in its career a higher altitude, pouring its light over a wider expanse of humanity, it has received no additional beams,—no accession of beauty. It has needed none. It has been sufficient to satisfy the wants, to assuage the sorrows, to cleanse the guilt, and to elevate the degradation of every race and of every age. As it is a gospel for the world, so is it an everlasting gospel,—good tidings for every nation and for every time. In minds of a superior order there is a longing after something immutable,—immutable, because perfect, either absolutely or relatively ; and hence the love and fond reverence with which they have clung to ancestral usages and the religion of their fathers. That longing is rightly satisfied here—in the gospel ; which needs no change,—which is as suited to us as to our fathers from whom we received it,—as suited to our individual wants, and to the claims and circumstances of the age in which we live. If then the gospel be ever the same in itself, and if its appropriateness and the necessity for it be also the same,

why speak of adaptation to the age? But it is not the message that is to be adapted to the age,—it is already adapted to this and to every era,—it is the *ministration* of it that is to be so adapted. And that the ministration of the word may vary,—*nay, ought* to be varied according to the difference of times and audiences, is as unquestionable as that the word itself has no variation. The authority which affirms the one exemplifies the other. The manner in which Paul reasoned with the Jews was certainly very different from his style of instructing the Gentiles; and how he could adapt his discourse to cultivated Gentiles,—to the wise men of this world,—we see from his address on Mars' Hill. Amongst believers he could distinguish between the babes and full grown men; and the difference in this respect that exists between particular audiences in the same age, will be found existing between one age and another. Thus, in the earliest period of the gospel, the first principles that were set forth in the sermon at Pentecost were enough for the Hebrew Christians: thirty years later, they are called by admonition and rebuke to "*go on to perfection*,"—to the study of the high and noble mysteries of the priesthood and services of the heavenly sanctuary. That form of the truth, and that particular ministry of it were required by the character of the epoch they had reached.—The best way (it appears to me) of indicating the adaptation which the ministry of the word should receive to make it effective in reference to the age, is—not to lay down certain methods of procedure, but to touch on the chief characteristics of the time, on which the

Christian preacher should have his eye, and to sketch the general discipline by which he should seek to be qualified to meet these, either in the way of friendly aid or of antagonism.

The present time is notoriously one of change and transition; old systems are breaking up, old ideas and usages are thrown to the winds; society elsewhere, and in some respects even here, is seething and fermenting, throwing up, as usual, much scum during the process. The objects that are sought by change are social and political improvement, and doubtless there is need of both; all parties are agreed in this, so that the whole age may be said to be committed to the pursuit of improvement in the things of this life. With this temper there are naturally allied, activity, enthusiasm, the love of novelty for its own sake, excessive confidence in human power and wisdom, suspicion and dislike of all that is established or that has enjoyed prescriptive regard, and an over-estimation of the objects that are sought by associated effort and the alliance of numbers, to the neglect of those that pertain to individual duty and individual exertion.—One particular form which the desire of social improvement has assumed, is that of a professed philanthropy and a concern for the poor and the ignorant. The sincerity of this in the case of the leaders of the movement must be as fully admitted as the excellence of the objects themselves. It is in fact a movement arising out of Christian principle, and influencing with power many who are ignorant of that principle. But when we view it in its whole extent, as a movement of the age, we see the purity

of its origin corrupted by many deteriorating elements. There is not only the tendency to assign too much importance to ameliorations that after all touch only the surface of life, leaving the depths of man's being unexplored and unpurified; but there is a fond reliance on principles and methods of purely human birth, that are essentially inadequate to cope with the evils that are assailed.—Another striking characteristic of the present day, which concerns us more nearly than any other, is the new spirit of religious speculation that is abroad. This is only another phase of the general eagerness for professed improvement or novelty. It is a very different phase, however, from that which was assumed by it in the last century. At that time, improvement in the domain of religion was sought by the partial or total abnegation of it,—by scepticism and unbelief, which were open and avowed. But now, while genuine faith is equally wanting, and true humility and reverence for the divine word are forgotten, there is an assumption put forward of a vague, indefinite belief, imposing, cloudy, and shapeless; resting on no foundation, pointing to no aim, limited by no creed, and guided by no authority; a faith, it is impossible to say *in what*;—for sometimes it is in humanity,—sometimes in the divine or the infinite,—in the progress of truth, or the progress of the species; a faith empty, shifting, and changeable as the wind,—and like the wind, unknown as to whence it came or whither it is going. This phantom-faith, by whose spells the German mind has long been fettered, now broods,—not as a creative spirit of light

and order, but as a spirit of darkness and confusion, —over a portion of the literary intellect of our country, producing a brood of worthless theories and fancies which men are to accept instead of the facts and living faith of the Bible. It is astonishing to hear what proud and confident words this phantom will utter. It will scout the idea of a revelation of word and doctrine, and refer us to an inward revelation of the Divine in our own hearts: it would take us away from the clear authoritative tones of the Bible, which stir the soul like the silver trumpets of the sanctuary, and bid us listen to the confused gibbering of a shadow which it conjures up, called *Religious consciousness*: it would sublimate and expand our conceptions of God to the thinnest vapour of abstraction, and bid us find him everywhere and in everything, when it has erased from the mind all impression of his personal and living existence. Now, it is true that this spurious faith, which is in fact a mystical rationalism, may receive full and ardent homage only from a few; the circle of its initiated worshippers may be confined to literary coteries and dreamers, but its influence is felt, and will be felt, much farther. It has already got its preacher, and he his crowd of eager auditors in the ordinary ranks of life. By means of many literary productions, and through its agreement with the natural promptings of the unregenerate heart, it operates with a silent but sensible touch in stirring the minds and moulding the thoughts of multitudes, who are ignorant of its proper form and tendency. Altogether it is an element in the character of the age, whose

working the Watchmen of Zion ought especially to mark, and to ignore which would convict them of gross blindness or unfaithfulness.

Having then all these things in view, how ought they to equip themselves for the conflict? or I would rather say, How are *we* to equip ourselves for the conflict? for I desire to feel my own responsibility in this matter in common with my brethren.

I. We must, in the first place, be penetrated with the most decided conviction that we are to seek for our panoply nowhere else than in the armoury of God:—that the old weapons of divine temper that have stood the brunt of so many a battle, will serve the purpose still. In the Word of God, and in the Gospel of his grace, we shall find all that we need; all the wisdom of conception, the power of truth, the treasures of love and goodness, demanded by the emergency. What is needed on our part is, skill conferred by kindred wisdom, the power arising from that truth living and ruling within us, and the earnest goodwill inspired by kindred love, to give the remedy effect. But we must first have full confidence in the remedy itself, in its own genuine simplicity. There must be no distrust of it, no diluting of its strength, or adulterating of its purity: no extrinsic aid or foreign alliances must be sought for. And there must also be no half-measures—no crippling of the truth. We must not offer men for food, the ethics of the Gospel, or the politics of the Bible (which are right enough in their place)—the philosophy of revealed truth, or any such mere adjunct or complement, but we must give them the core of the

system, "*Christ and him crucified.*" We must urge it on each individual, "warning every man, and teaching every man," that if he would raise any structure of improvement for himself or for others; if he would aid in settling society on a surer basis; if he would give greater stability and elevation to thought and character; if he would add a single stone to the rising edifice of truth; it must be by laying first this only foundation, *Christ crucified.* If men will stumble at this, let it be "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence," we will not remove it; we will not round the sharpness of its angles, or smooth the roughness of its surface, but cling to it in its superhuman massiveness and strength, glorying in its preciousness. The gospel, even as the Apostles preached it, unimproved and unimprovable by time, scorning all alliance with philosophy,—all ornaments and accommodations of human wisdom,—that old gospel is still our wisdom and strength: the Cross in all its reproach and weakness, *by that we are to conquer.*

I have insisted the more on this elementary statement—which may have seemed superfluous to some—viz. the immutability of the gospel and its single sufficiency, because the temptation is to forget it,—to be so carried away by the current of the time as to lose sight of the primitive simplicity of our message; and while we imagine we are adapting our ministry to the age, to be in fact depriving it of the only thing that can give it adaptation and power.

II. But I must say a few words also on the manner in which we are to conduct this ministry; or,

rather, on the kind of discipline by which we are to be qualified to apply the gospel efficiently to the necessities of the time.

In professed teachers of religion, there is a form of acquaintance with the gospel which is derived mainly at second-hand from the instructions of other men. They have often been content to dispense water, not drawn immediately from the fountain of inspiration, but procured from the cisterns where others had kept it. In that case, of course, it could not have the sparkle and the freshness, which it would have had, if brought directly from the spring, yet it might refresh and enliven to some extent. But admitting this—which is perhaps too much—admitting that at one time such a knowledge of the gospel would serve, in the case of its public expositors, it will not now. In a time of change and the unsettling of all established things—when what is prescribed and propounded is subjected to sifting examination—when grounds and reasons are demanded, and we are driven back to original authorities; we must explore for ourselves the depths of divine wisdom, and drink with our own lips from the gushing springs of divine life. We must be familiar—not with Articles, Confessions, and Systems, however admirable for logical structure and Scriptural character; but must seek by personal investigation to have an intimate knowledge of the principles of that Record on which our teaching rests. We must form our belief, not from the utterance of the Academic chair, or that of any Master in Israel, however judicious and profound; but from our own study

of the doctrine of Him who taught with authority—our own proof and trial of its application and efficiency—our own audience of the voice of the Son of God, and experience of its power. We must have felt how it could meet the demands, and calm the struggles of our own hearts, when shaken and clouded by the passing tempest. For he only will be a preacher well adapted to his age, who has undergone within himself its mighty conflict; in the depths of whose soul the same great questions have been raised that are causing the billows of society to heave around us; and who, amidst the darkness and storm, the mounting aspirations and defeats of his inner nature, has found the gospel to answer his need, settling those questions and calming the agitations they had raised—shining forth as a light to dispel the darkness, and as a hope that promised a right fulfilment to his longings, and a triumph of enduring joy. In short, the gospel must have undergone a personal revelation within us, and have become a vital fact in our own inner history, while that history is itself a transcript of the time. If we are to *preach to the age*, we must be *men of the age*—not standing aloof from its movements in tranquil isolation, but feeling in our own bosoms their ebb and flow: our ears must be open to the myriad voices of the time—our hearts must be impressible by them, feeling a due and generous sympathy with the great body of mankind of which we are members. But how to listen—how to sympathize—how to answer; all this we must be taught by communion with, and subjection to Him who is above all times,

yet embraces in himself the interests of every generation, and hath sympathies for each condition of humanity, with wisdom to guide and authority to control all its endeavours; being at once the Perfection of Man, and the Effulgence of Deity. What a mighty influence will this have on our teaching! We shall utter our message, not as what we have learned by study, or gained from testimony, but as what we ourselves have seen and felt, tasted and handled of the Word of life. Our own experience will be our guide to the application of the remedy, instructing us in the true rhetoric of the pulpit. We shall speak with all the living earnestness that belongs to a theme of personal action and suffering: knowing, rather than believing, our confidence will itself carry home conviction; and our appeals and arguments will have appropriateness, and exactness of aim, from our perfect perception of the mark we have to reach. Our teaching will spontaneously assume the form, and clothe itself in the illustrations that are best fitted to impress the minds of our fellows. It will have a freshness, a distinctness, a clearness of presentation, such as naturally charms the attention; an honest and firm directness, by which opposition will be quelled: instead of being rejected, which it often has been, as "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable," it will be welcome as the breezes of spring, ushering in the flowers and the music of mountain streams: falling with gentle and quickening influence on the dusty and world-worn spirit, our doctrine will drop as the rain, and our speech distil as the dew.

III. It is fitting that I should make a few remarks on those relations and aspects of gospel truth, to which we ought to give prominence in our teaching, as being especially suited to the present time.

In considering the social movements of an age, we must make a marked distinction between the wants that are felt or the evils that are complained of, and the methods proposed for meeting these. While the latter may be erroneous or defective, the former are commonly genuine necessities and ills, demanding our attention and sympathy; and we, as professing to hold and apply the great remedy, are bound to make its adaptation to them manifest and effective. Let me briefly indicate, how this may be done in the present case.

The pursuit of improvement—rectification—reform, is the chief characteristic of the day. This supposes that things are out of joint—that men and their institutions are not in harmony together—that the parts of society have become dissociated. It is *reconciliation* that is needed, and well-founded friendship; the reconciliation of the old and the new—of ranks that are widely separated—of opposite parties, theories, and interests; and the binding together in a league of mutual accord, on the basis of fair concessions, those who now regard each other as natural enemies. How shall “the enmity be abolished?” Only by insisting on the previous necessity of the extinction of a more deeply rooted and fatal dissension—the source of every other—man’s enmity to God. To overcome this and replace it by an eternal friendship, we must announce

the glorious reconciliation by the blood of Christ. This heals all schisms—closes every breach—reunites man to his Father in heaven, and enables him to say, with humble and repentant heart, "*our Father,*" embracing all men as his brethren; while he enjoys inward peace—a peace diffusing itself through all his relations, as it springs from Him who hath reconciled each hostile party unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. This therefore we have first to present, *the reconciliation of the cross*, instead of the false or useless forms of concord devised by human wisdom.—In urging men to accede to this divine reconciliation, we have also to urge home the great truth of *individual responsibility*. When seeking changes on a large scale, which affect society in the mass, men are prone to lose sight of the individual forms of the evil they oppose. But the gospel speaks to each man by himself, taking him out of the mass, dealing with his individual wants and evils; curing each one separately, often by slow and difficult process, but really curing him—eradicating the disease. Then again, in striving to effect such great changes, men can do nothing comparatively except by associated action; they move in large and organized bodies; they must be guided by the voice of the majority, and individual responsibility is lost sight of. But the gospel, as it speaks to each by himself, speaks with a voice of authority to which *he*, personally, is bound to listen—which he is bound to obey, though every other man rebel: it excludes from his view for the time all the universe besides,

save the God he has offended, and the Saviour who invites him. The questions which we have to teach him to ask, are—What must *I* do to be saved? Lord, what will thou have *me* to do?

Farther: we have to insist on the *incompetency of human power* to cope with the chief and radical evils of humanity. At such a time as the present—it has been remarked—an overweening estimate of man's powers prevails; and what is the consequence? For a time, I grant, it leads to extraordinary effort, the exertion of all the energy man can put forth: then come disappointment, collapse, despondency, despair. But the gospel, by smiting down at once all vain confidence in a strength we have not, leads us to the true and inexhaustible source of a power that cannot be defeated; and we rejoice to proclaim and acknowledge our weakness, not to excuse inertness and indolence, but that, while we labour more abundantly than others, it may be known that "the excellency of the power is of God, and not of us."

Again: not in opposition to social and political regeneration, but as collaterally promotive of these, we preach, in the gospel, the necessity of a *spiritual regeneration*. We proclaim, that

"He is a freeman, whom the Truth makes free,
And all are slaves besides."

Thus we remove the foul and disastrous blot that has often stained the brow of loud-tongued patriots, who, while professing to be the liberators of their country, have themselves been the slaves of imperious passions, and the tyrants of all beneath them. We urge men to the attainment of a freedom, conferred

by the royal charter of the covenant; a freedom, that may be enjoyed under every government,—that sets a man free from the tyranny of his own apostate spirit, and makes him a king in the realm of his own mind and conscience; and which, spreading through the mass of society, will liberalize its institutions more effectually than aught besides, still working onwards in the liberation and union of all races, till the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ.

Lastly; we preach this regeneration as springing only from the fulness of life that dwells in an incarnate and glorified Redeemer. In contrast to the vagueness of that phantom-faith of which I have spoken, and to its dim and shapeless ideas, we present the most palpable, concrete manifestation of the Godhead, and of all truth and grace,—*the Son of Man, who is the Lord from heaven*. We call men away from all illusion, however imposing and lofty in pretence, on which neither understanding nor heart can rest, and bid them look with earnest and steadfast gaze at this reality—*God manifest in the flesh*—that form which stands out before us on the ever-vivid page of Scripture narrative, as distinct, life-like and majestic, as if he were now moving and acting among us. The sensible character of this manifestation, appealing as it does to our ordinary faculties, and our natural sympathies and affections, and including attractions most subduing to the mind, we have especially to press upon them. Let them know and feel that we preach no abstract principles—no fine-spun theories—no sentimental imaginations—yea,

not a system of doctrines merely, however logical and true; but FACTS that admit of no reasonable question—FACTS, that have the mightiest power to stir the human spirit to its depths, awakening emotions of eternal consequence, and transforming the whole nature until it wears the image of the heavenly. We bring in contact with the actuality of their own being, the actuality of the Son of God: we lead them back from haunts of earthly interest to the scenes of Bethlehem, Nazareth, Tabor and the Sea of Galilee, Gethsemane, Calvary and Olivet: we bid them listen to that voice—is it not divine? speaks it not with a thrilling power, intelligible and victorious in every breast? We bid them come to him and receive his touch—is there not a virtue in it that expels the foulest spirits from their hold, and imparts both life and purity, the peace and hope and blessedness of heaven?

But I must close—with this one remark. We must conduct our ministry in the strength of that same life which we thus present to others. Ours must be the ministration of the Spirit—the Spirit of the Lord, transforming ourselves from glory to glory, and working in those who hear us the fruits of righteousness, the earnest of immortality. Thus shall we prove a *Ministry adapted to the age*—adapted to supply its wants, to cure its evils, to give it greater blessings than it dreams of asking—to make it an age pre-eminently adorned and illustrious by the truth, the freedom, and the triumphs of the gospel.

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